

Would You Rather... Prolog

Life isn't a movie or a fiction story. Life is sometimes rather boring depending on one's viewpoint. People are born, live and die with nothing more exciting in their life than winning the Homecoming Football game or having a fender bender. That's not always the case for some. For the majority, however, it's probably true. A life such as this, if not mundane, is not very exciting. The tale I'm about to weave comes straight from my diary.

The diary didn't note each and every event that happened over the years. I did try to mention events when they occurred. But, I'm human and prone to all the failings of the average human being. Some events of interest were noted out of order, sue me. The wife and I obviously survived what happened. Our survival was largely due to our preparations. It would be more accurate to say the preparations that my wife's father provided for us.

Some the entries were fill-ins where information learned after the fact was recorded in the blank space I left for it until I/we really knew what happened. Those entries should be obvious because they refer to events that we were unaware of when they happened or who was involved.

Never marry a woman whose family is rolling in money; especially if she's an only child. If you do, you'd better learn to swallow your pride because pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. The tale begins with the Springfield Armory M1A, but changes when other alternatives become available.

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Hi, my name is Alan Bourdillion Traherne. The family name is Traherne; the rest of it came from the John Wayne movie 'El Dorado', as it was explained to me. I was named after a James Caan character in a movie? I was born July 21, 1969. The date is significant to me because it's my birthday. It's important to the country because that's the first day that man walked on the Moon.

My early years aren't much different than any kid growing up, so far as I can remember. Mom and Dad ran Grandpa's ranch during my early years and inherited when Grandpa died from a heart attack. It happened on a school day when I was in second grade. I sure can remember finding out about it. My sister and I were called to the office. Mom was there and had been crying.

"Kids, I'm afraid I have some bad news. Your Grandpa was out helping your Dad move some horses. Anyway, he fell out of the saddle and your Dad rushed to see what had happened. He was dead. You know how we've told you that your Grandpa had a bad heart? We think that's what happened. Gather your things and we'll go home."

Dad wasn't home when we got there. He returned about an hour or so later and it looked to me like he'd been crying. He more or less repeated what Mom had told us. Let me explain the 'us' part. Julie is my older sister, by two years. I was seven when Grandpa died and she was nine.

I said we lived on a ranch. Specifically, it was a horse ranch. It wasn't only a ranch either. It was a full section with 320 acres devoted to crops, ten acres to the homestead and the remaining 310 acres permanent pasture. We grew wheat, corn, oats, barley, alfalfa and timothy. The homestead had a huge old barn, the house, the well shed, a machine shed, a gas tank, a diesel tank and a very large garden area.

We had an old Ford tractor, a 961 with a diesel engine, to pull wagons and other general farm work like planting, cultivating and pulling wagons. Grandpa's Ford self-propelled combine had all kinds of different heads and could harvest all of the field crops except the hay. He had a twine baler for the alfalfa and timothy plus a mower and rake for the Ford.

Five years later, when I was in seventh grade and Julie was in ninth, we learned more about life, and death. We didn't get out of school early that day. When we got off the bus and got into the house, Mom and Dad were sitting at the kitchen table and Mom was crying, again. More about that in a minute.

Our Grandpa and Grandma Henry lived in Pennsylvania and we lived in eastern Colorado. We didn't see much of Grandpa and Grandma Henry. Grandpa Henry had a stroke the previous year and was in a convalescent home. Grandma Henry wouldn't leave home to visit and spent her time visiting Grandpa in the home.

Mom and Dad didn't get married until they were in their late twenties or early thirties. Mom was thirty three when Julie was born and thirty five when I came along. Dad was two years older than Mom.

"What's wrong?" Julie asked.

"Sit down for a moment kids, we have something to explain. We went to the doctor last week because your father hasn't been feeling right for some time. The doctor did some tests and took a chest X-Ray. Your Dad had to go back for a biopsy and we got the results today. It confirmed what the doctor suspected from the X-Ray, your Dad has lung cancer."

"But," I asked, "They can operate, right?"

Dad replied, "No Alan, it's too advanced and is spreading throughout my body. The doctor said that it's in stage four. I don't have much time left. Your mother and I have been talking and we're going to get the ranch title put into a trust fund for you and your sister. Your Mom and our hired man, Mac, will run the operation until you're both old enough to run it for yourselves. It will only be the title; the income from the operations will go to

whoever is operating the ranch. When you turn 21, Alan, the trust will be dissolved and you two will own the ranch.”

That memory is plain as day. Dad died four months later and was buried in the family plot alongside Grandpa and Grandma. At that point in our growing up, Julie and I started to do a lot more chores. I hated mucking the barn; I mean I truly hated it. Julie had to help Mom can the produce from the garden and because of the change in our family makeup she did most of it after that by herself. We got an allowance based on how much work we were doing, something like a wage.

Mom never remarried and Mac stuck with the ranch through the years. Before he died, Dad got out all of his firearms and put them on the kitchen table.

“This rifle is the Springfield 1903. It belonged to your Great Grandpa. It shoots .30-06 and was his rifle when he fought in the war. This rifle is a Garand. It’s a semi-automatic rather than a bolt action. It uses an enbloc clip holding eight .30-06 rounds. It was your Grandpa’s. This one was one I bought when they were available. It’s an M-1 .30 caliber carbine. There are the standard issue 15 round magazines and some 30 round magazines they used on the M-2. The bolt action rifle with the scope is a Winchester Model 70 in .30-06.

“Those handguns you see are your Great Grandfather’s M1911 and your Grandfather’s M1911A1. They shoot .45ACP cartridges and the magazines hold seven rounds. This one here is a Ruger Standard in .22LR. That revolver over there is a Smith and Wesson model 29. It’s a double action revolver and I have speed loaders for it.

“Now, I suppose you’re wondering about the lever action rifles and single action revolvers. There’s a Winchester model 9422 and a Single Six revolver. There is a Marlin 1894C in .357 magnum and a matching Ruger Blackhawk in the same caliber. You’ve seen me wearing the revolver and carrying the rifle in a scabbard, occasionally.

“The other Marlin rifle is an 1894 in .44 magnum, same as the Smith and Wesson. It has a matching Super Blackhawk in .44 magnum.

“Let’s see. Ah, the shotguns. The one with the hammer was your Great Grandfather’s and it’s a Winchester Model 1897 trench gun. The one next to it was your Grandfather’s model 12. Both are 12 gauge. My shotgun as a boy was that Remington 870 pump in 20 gauge. When I graduated from high school, your Grandfather gave me an 870 in 12 gauge.

“That final pistol belonged to your Grandmother Henry. It’s slightly different from your typical Browning Hi-Power because it has the lanyard ring. Your Grandfather Henry got it in Europe during the Second War. Your Uncle David got all of your Grandfather Henry’s firearms except for that pistol which he gave to your Mother, Ruth. She, in turn, gave it to me because she doesn’t like firearms.

“When the two of you are old enough, I expect you to divide the firearms and Julie should get at least the 20 gauge, the carbine and the Browning. Would you wipe them down with the silicon gun cloth, put them back in their socks and cases and put them back in the gun cabinet, please?”

Eventually, I went through the ammo that Dad had for each of the firearms. He had a lot of the .30-06, obviously. Much of it was surplus, full metal jacket. Some was on five round stripper clips and some was those eight round enbloc clips. There was a large assortment of .30-06 for the model 70, too. There was everything from 150gr up to 220gr. There wasn't a firearm in the collection that Dad had less than 1,000 rounds of ammo for.

I graduated last week. I have nothing against the military but it's not the life for me. Ranching and farming is going to be a full time job. Julie married her high school sweetheart three weeks after she graduated. He had a job lined up with Monsanto and they moved to Illinois. I honored Dad's wishes and offered her the Browning, 20 gauge and carbine. She didn't want any of the three, citing bad memories and a dislike of firearms.

In three more years, Julie and I get the farm from the trust. She told me that gave me three years to line up financing and she'd sell her share to me at market value. That was the tail end of a conversation we had when she called Mom and me to announce she was expecting.

I started a journal in a composition book I had left over from high school. I've reviewed it and it's a little boring. It does tell how I/we got here from there.

Would You Rather... One

Mona and the Ranch.

Mom and I divided the income from the ranch equally this year. I banked most of my share and have enough for about five acres. We sold about the average number of horses and tack. We had to pay Mac for his time and buy seed for next year's crops. I decided to buy heirloom seeds instead of the usual hybrids. They were a little harder to find and cost a bit more.

In the long run, though, the ranch should recover the investment and more. It will mean letting some of the alfalfa and timothy go to seed, but should be worth it. We added a bull and three milk cows and a boar and four sows to our livestock pool this year. We'll have a market crop of hogs this fall.

Mona Freeman and I had dated occasionally during high school. She turned me down when I asked her to go to the Senior Prom with me and I didn't see much of her after that. I actually ended up not going to the Prom. After high school, she took a job at the local extension office. That's where I ran into her.

"Uh, hi Mona. I didn't know you worked here."

"Got the job right after graduation. How are you doing?"

"Same as always, I guess. More work than normal. Julie called Mom and me and they're going to have a baby."

"Congratulations. Haven't seen much of you since I turned you down on the Prom. You weren't even there. But Jeff asked me first and I accepted when I didn't hear from you. Boy was that a mistake."

"What happened?"

"I don't want to talk about it here in the office. Want to get a pizza or something for supper? I can tell you then."

"It will be a little late; I have to milk the cows. Yes, Pizza Hut ok?"

"Pick me up?"

"Do you still live at home?"

"Yes."

"Mom and Dad went out for dinner. Would you like a beer?"

“Thanks, but no thanks. Ready to go?”

“Let me get my jacket and purse.”

We found a table at Pizza Hut because it was just after the regular rush hour. We ordered a large pizza and Pepsi’s. That’s when Mona told me about the Prom.

“I should have waited for you to ask. You waited too long and I was afraid I wouldn’t have a date so I told Jeff yes. You can’t imagine what it was like. They should call him ‘The Octopus’. He had his hands all over me and ignored me every time I told him to stop.

“I kept looking for you to show up and rescue me. I know it’s not proper to leave with someone other the guy that brought you. In this case, I would have made an exception. I insisted we leave early and do you know what? He thought I wanted to leave early so we could go to a motel. I set him straight in a hurry and was home before eleven.”

“I’m sorry about that, Mona. If you would have called, I would have dressed up in my suit and been there ASAP.”

“So, are you going to forgive me for going to the Prom with Jeff rather than you?”

“Nothing to forgive, but I’m not angry or anything.”

“Would you be interested in dating again?”

“Would you?”

“Yes, really.”

“I have to tell you that it will be mostly weekend dates. Mac is getting older and not really pulling his weight. I sometimes think that maybe Mom and he are more than employer-employee. Nothing has been said, but he’s been hinting around about getting a job in town. I mentioned it to Mom and she said she was thinking of moving to town herself. I let it go at that.”

“I noticed that you smoke now. When did you start?”

“After the Prom.”

“I never thought I’d see you smoking, what with your father dying of lung cancer. After the Prom? Am I responsible?”

“No, Mona, it was an individual decision. I do plan to wait until it’s legal before I start drinking. Mom keeps some 3.2 around but I’ve never been tempted. I can’t afford to lose

my driver's license because of bad judgment and drunk driving. I'll be happy to wait. I'm full; do you want to take the leftovers?"

"No, you take them."

That was the beginning. Mona and I started dating again. It was mostly movies on Saturday or Church on Sundays. Once in a while, I would get tickets for a concert in Denver and we'd drive in. The problem was that the concerts usually ran long and it was early morning before we got home. She had suggested we get a motel room with twin beds. By then, my feelings were getting pretty strong and I politely refused, afraid I'd end up being like Jeff.

Julie had a baby boy who they named Alan. About a year later, she also had a baby girl who they named Ruth. She called one day to discuss the ranch.

"Have you lined up financing?"

"Not yet. I do have some money set aside for a down payment. It would only be enough for fifty acres. Would you be interested in a land sale contract?"

"What's that?"

"Basically, you provide the financing and I pay you interest and principal for a set amount of time at a set rate of interest. You retain title to the land until you are paid in full."

"Does it include a down payment?"

"Yes, the money I have set aside that would pay for the fifty acres."

"We'll talk it over and I'll get back to you. What interest rate?"

"Prime rate at the time we enter into the contract."

"Isn't that lower than normal?"

"Yes, it's the rate banks charge each other."

"Mom says Mona and you are dating again."

"We have been for nearly three years."

"You two plan on getting married?"

"Maybe, someday."

“You’re smart not rushing into anything. Trust me on that.”

“Something wrong?”

“Not really. I’ll call back when I’ve decided.”

I noticed she went from ‘we’ll talk it over’ to ‘when I’ve decided’.

Not my business, but...

“Mom, what’s up from Julie?”

“What do you mean Alan?”

“I just talked to her about my buying the ranch. I offered to buy it on a land sale contract putting down all my savings as a down payment. When I first mentioned the contract, she said ‘we’ll talk about it’. Then, after we discussed the interest rate, she said she’d let me know ‘when she decided’. She also brought up Mona and asked if we were planning on getting married. I told her maybe and she said, ‘You’re smart not rushing into anything. Trust me on that.’ What’s up?”

“She thinks he got the seven year itch early.”

“Oh? Is she guessing or is it a fact?”

“She’s guessing, for now. They’ve been married five years so... well, I don’t know what to think.”

“Should we do something?”

“Butt out unless she asks for help. I pressed as far as I dared and she says that he’s not abusing her.”

“Do you have her address?”

“Yes, why? You aren’t planning on going to Illinois and check on her are you?”

“She’s my sister. I’m going to check on her. I’ll tell her I wanted to meet with her and iron out the details on the land contract if she’s agreeable. I’ll have the contract and down payment with me.”

“Are you going to take Mona with you?”

“Mom, our relationship isn’t at a point where I’m willing to do that. I did buy a set of rings. When the time is right, I will ask her. When I’m ready, ok? Please don’t call Julie and tell her I’m coming.”

“Ok. Mac and I are getting married. He has that house in town and I’ll be moving when we get married. He will work for you only until you can find a new hired man. Mac has a job waiting for him so don’t take too long to hire someone.”

“You’ll wait until I get back?”

“Yes, but make it quick.”

That made a change in my plans and after I packed a suitcase, I called Mona at work.

“Mona, I have to make a trip to Illinois. There’s something I want to ask you before I leave. Could we have dinner at Pizza Hut when you get off from work?”

“Sure. Why are you going to Illinois?”

“I’ll explain at dinner.”

First off, I planned to tell Mona that Mom and Mac were getting married and Mom would be moving off the ranch into town. Second, I wanted to explain why I had to go to Illinois. Finally, I decided to pop the question. Not in Pizza Hut, but before we went in or after we left. It wasn’t the romantic situation I had wanted to create; I’d passed up too many of those already.

I figured she’d say yes, despite the circumstances since she indicated a willingness to share a motel room when we went to Denver. Whatever, I figured the odds were in favor of yes. I was held up and by the time I got to Pizza Hut, Mona was already inside and had ordered for us.

“Hi, sorry I’m late. Mom and Mac are getting married and she’s moving to town. The reason I’m going to Illinois is to check on Julie and see if we can work out a contract for me to buy her half of the ranch.”

“That’s surprising, I wondered if your Mom would remarry. The hired man, huh?”

“Not for long, he’s been hinting and Mom said he had a new job waiting here in town. There is something I want to ask you but it will have to wait until after dinner.”

“Why?”

“Uh…”

“You didn’t! Pizza Hut isn’t exactly what I had in mind but yes.”

“Yes what?”

“Yes, I will marry you Alan. Did you buy rings?”

“I did. That’s why I got you the friendship ring, to get your ring size.”

“Can I see it?”

“Oh, sorry. Mona, will you marry me?”

“I already answered, don’t you believe me? So I’m going the mistress of the house and get to fool around with the new hired man, right?”

“What?”

“I’m teasing. I bet I’ll be working harder than ever. You’re just lucky we raised a garden every year and my Mother taught me to can. You want me to go on the trip to Illinois with you?”

“Of course I’d like it, but it wouldn’t be proper, don’t you see. You need time to give notice and plan our wedding. I didn’t ask your father for permission so I hope that’s not required.”

“They’ve been wondering when you’d finally get around to it. They do approve, you know.”

“How would I know that?”

“Daddy would have told you if they didn’t. He might have even run you off with a shotgun.”

I didn’t get to seal the deal with a kiss until we left the restaurant. I won’t be forgetting that kiss for a while. The ranch is outside Sterling and I-76 runs just east of town. I didn’t want drive into Denver to pick up I-70 so I only took I-76 partway to Denver and turned south to pick up I-70. I then headed east across Colorado and into Kansas. I wasn’t really tired and just kept driving. I got to Lawrence before I was too tired to drive further.

Around 3pm, I got up and got a shower and shaved. There was a McDonalds nearby and I got a bite to eat and topped off the pickup’s tank. My destination was Sauget, Illinois, near East St. Louis. By the time I reached the western suburbs of St. Louis, it was time to stop and get a motel room and something to eat besides fast food. Why is it, when you get close to a large city the motel rates are so darned high? When I checked in, I asked about an affordable restaurant and was told McDonalds, Taco Bell and a Pizza Hut were nearby.

After choking down a Quarter Pounder with cheese, a medium fries and a large Coke, I went back to the room to watch TV. It was the Central Time Zone and all the programs aired an hour earlier. The counter had local maps and I bought one to determine exactly

where Sauget was. The address Mom gave me wasn't for Sauget when I looked closer it was in Cahokia, south of Sauget. I showered and shaved again before turning in.

I'm just a farm boy and driving through St. Louis was a nightmare. When I got east of the river, I didn't like the looks of the neighborhoods. I also noticed that there were more black citizens in Cahokia than I was used to. I found a payphone and called Julie.

"Julie, this is Alan. I'm in town and wondered if it was ok for me to stop by to see you?"

"What are you doing here?"

"I brought the land contract and the down payment if you've decided to agree. I also brought some news from home."

"Do you have the address?"

"Mom gave it to me and I have a map so it shouldn't take me more than a half hour. Sorry to show up on short notice."

"Then, I'll see you in a half an hour. Could you stop by a grocery store and pickup two loaves of bread and a gallon of milk? I won't have time before you get here."

"Sure, no problem. Wonder bread?"

"Perfect and get the large loaves."

Hmm, money problems? I got the bread, milk, Lays Classic Chips and a package of bologna to cover my lunch, just in case.

"Come on in. You could have knocked me over with a feather when you called and said you were in town."

"I talked to Mom. Is everything ok here? Mom didn't tell me much but gave a few hints."

"Are you referring to Bob? He claimed he was working overtime and I was skeptical. When I saw his next paycheck, he really was putting in overtime. Let me pay you for the groceries. I really was going grocery shopping this morning. You said you had some news."

"Mom and Mac are getting married."

"It's about time. I've told her more than once than once that she should remarry. She called and told me about getting married but didn't mention you were headed this way."

"I asked her not to tell you, so don't blame her."

“So, you drove all that way to check up on me and to tell me Mom’s getting married?”

“One more thing; I asked Mona to marry me.”

“She said yes, right?”

“When I think about it, she said yes before I asked her.”

“She proposed to you?”

“Not exactly. I met her after work at Pizza Hut for dinner. I was going to wait until after dinner, but I mentioned there was something I wanted to ask her and she said yes before I got a chance to ask.”

“Did you set a date?”

“I left that up to her.”

“Smart man. I think maybe I gave you the wrong impression about not rushing into things. If I did, I’m sorry.”

“I wouldn’t mind meeting my nephew and niece.”

“As soon as they get up from their naps. What’s with the lunch meat and chips?”

“Something for lunch.”

“Are you hungry?”

“I didn’t have breakfast.”

“Bologna and cheese with lettuce and mayo?”

“Yes please and a Coke if you have it.”

“It will have to be Seven-up or coffee.”

“Seven-up, please.”

“Will you be in town long?”

“Only as long as it takes to get your decision on the Land Contract and get our signatures notarized if you agree to the terms.”

"I discussed it with Bob and he said it's my decision since it isn't community property. The property was in trust for the two of us before Bob and I got married so the money from the sale is mine. I think I'll invest it for the kids' educations."

"Then you're agreeable?"

"How long is it for?"

"Fifteen years."

"We'll have to wait until the kids are up, cleaned up and fed. We can get it notarized at my bank. How much is the down payment?"

"I have thirty thousand in a cashier's check."

"What's the ranch worth?"

"The current median price is \$525 per acre, a total for your half section is \$168,000."

"That's all?"

"Yep. But that is median price and I'm willing to go \$600 per acre or \$192,000."

"You cover the taxes?"

"Yes."

"What's the prime interest rate?"

"As of July 1, 1990, 10 percent."

"How much are the annual payments?"

"Ten thousand-eight hundred plus interest, paid once a year."

"And the first year payment in total?"

"An even twenty seven thousand. The principal payments are the same every year. Obviously the amount of interest declines every year."

"Have you done a spreadsheet?"

"Sure did, here's a copy."

"Oh yeah, you definitely have a deal. Can you stay for supper?"

“I planned to take off as soon as the papers are signed, if you don’t mind. Don’t forget that the interest income is taxable. Also, if we can make larger principal payments, the interest will be less in total.”

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We had a bite to eat, got the documents notarized and she headed to a different bank to open a saving account in her and the kids’ names only. I struggled through the St. Louis traffic and made it to Columbia when I stopped for the night. I had a good meal in a local café and got a good night’s sleep. When I left early the next morning, I decided to drive straight through. When I pulled into the ranch, Mona’s car was there.

“Hi, good trip?”

“Actually, it was. Bob isn’t cheating on Julie, just putting in overtime. She agreed to the land contract. What are you doing here, and why aren’t you at work?”

“Vacation day. Your sister called your Mom and your Mom called me. I didn’t tell her you proposed or I accepted; she’s sharp and I couldn’t get anything past her. The first thing she noticed was my engagement ring. I couldn’t lie to her. All she said was something like, ‘about time’.”

“I honestly never believed she’d remarry. I’m happy for her, Mac is ok but not up to some of the harder work.”

“That’s one of the reasons I’m here. The other includes finishing the kiss we started the other night and to check out the home and ranch. A guy came by the extension office asking if we knew of any farmers or ranchers looking for a hired hand. I gathered a little information about him during the conversation. He had two years of college studying animal husbandry. He took a job as a hired hand to earn money to finish his degree. It took him about six years working and going to school before he graduated.

“He stayed on as a hired hand while looking for a job where he could use his education better. Apparently, that took him some time before a rancher hired him for his brain rather than his brawn, as a hired hand. The rancher sold his ranch and retired. The new owner didn’t need a hired hand. He’s about forty and married. They live in a singlewide mobile home.”

“Did you get his number?”

“You betcha. Interested?”

“I’ll call him after we finish up that kiss.”

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“Ok, let me have his name and number.”

“You’ll have to wait to call him until after six. He told me that when he gave me his number. He will be available to start working after the end of next week. His name is Harry Hanson and I didn’t get his wife or kid’s names. They have two, both boys.”

“Did you find out how old they are?”

“Teens. How about a tour of the ranch?”

“Sure, let’s go. The building behind us is the house, of course. That small building over there is the well house. Over there to your left is the chicken yard and hen house. They’re empty as you can see. Over there to your right is the garden area. Next to it is the new hog house slash cattle barn. To the left of that is the horse barn. Across from it is the machine shed where we store all of our farming equipment. At the end of the machine shed are the diesel and gas tanks on stands. Gas is the smaller tank.

“Behind the house is the propane tank and it’s a big one. Don’t ask me how Dad got them, but there’s a buried 3,000 gallon tank and an above ground 3,000 gallon tank. You know, maybe Dad didn’t get them; it could have been Grandpa. Let’s saddle a couple of horses and ride the range, so to speak.”

“I haven’t ridden much.”

“Then you get the gentler of the geldings.”

I saddled the horses and we rode back to the house.

“Hold my reins, I’ll be right back.”

I got the 1894 and strapped on the Super Blackhawk. Returning to my horse, I slipped the rifle into the empty scabbard and mounted.

“Ready to go?”

“Are you expecting an Indian attack?”

“Mostly habit and rarely we’ll run into a rattler. The rifle and revolver are .44 magnum caliber. I normally carry .44 magnum in the rifle and .44 special in the revolver.”

“Do you have more rifles and revolvers?”

“Quite a few. Most are family heirlooms dating all the way back to the First World War. I haven’t added firearms from my generation, yet.”

“I’m curious. What firearms do you consider our generation?”

“In the military style firearms, the M-14 and the M-16. I won’t be buying them right away. I’ve looked at the Springfield Armory M1A and I like it. It just looks like an American rifle. They’re sort of a reengineered Garand with a box magazine. As far as the M-16, I’d get a civilian produced semi-auto equivalent. Probably add a Beretta 9mm pistol and the Mossberg pump. The four are all currently in use by our armed forces.”

“What’s this field?”

“Alfalfa. The next on your right is Timothy. Timothy is commonly grown for cattle feed and, in particular, as hay for horses. It is relatively high in fiber, especially when cut late. It is considered part of the standard mix for grass hay and provides quality nutrition for horses.”

“I didn’t know you had cattle and hogs.”

“Recent additions. Next spring, we’ll be adding chickens. The old home place is going to be more of a farm than a horse ranch. We’ll fence off a portion of the pasture for the cattle and hogs when I can figure out how to do that. The horse pasture has wooden fences. The pasture for the cattle and hogs should be woven wire on the bottom and barbed wire on the top. I don’t want the horses’ anywhere near barbed wire and I don’t want the cattle anywhere near the wooden fences. It’s a puzzle for sure.”

“You could move the wooden fence first. Then, you could put up the woven wire slash barbed wire fence. You could do the roadside and back end first. That would allow the cattle and hogs to get out. Meanwhile, you and the new hired man could erect the last fence inside of the wooden fence. If you made the distance far enough, you could create a lane to some of the fields.”

“Pretty good plan Mona. Remind me to get that down on paper. Ok, this field here to the far right is six row hulless barley, next to it is wheat, the one in the center is obviously corn and the last on your left are oats.”

“You mentioned rattlesnakes. What kind?”

“Massassauga. They are rather shy and avoid humans when they can. You don’t see many. If you do see one, walk away if you can; otherwise let it leave on its own accord. Western Colorado has a high population of prairie rattlesnakes. I’ve heard stories about Western Diamondbacks but I’ve never seen one. I think it’s doubtful, but unlike the Massassauga, the Western Diamondback is aggressive.

“I think you might want to carry a .22 caliber pistol, just in case. I’ve been carrying my rifle and revolver for years and have yet to need either. I heard someone say, ‘would you rather have it and not need it or need it and not have it’? Carried ever since on the ranch. I got a concealed carry permit when I turned 21. I haven’t carried though be-

cause I haven't decided what I'd want to carry. I might get a Glock 21 when I buy the other firearms I told you about."

"Can I get a CCW?"

"I don't see why not. Do you shoot?"

"I can learn."

Would You Rather... Two

Weddings and new lives.

“Mac and I would like you and Mona to stand up with us. It’s just a civil ceremony in front of a Judge and we need witnesses.”

“I will, I’ll have to ask Mona. When do you need to know?”

“Day after tomorrow before noon. Our appointment is at 2pm.”

“Mona, Alan. Mom asked if you and I would stand up with them. The day after tomorrow at 2pm. You will? Great I’ll tell her. Just a nice dress and I’ll be wearing my suit. Gray, I only have one. Yes, that dress would be perfect. Ok. Ok. Bye.”

“You have your witnesses. Can I ask you something?”

“Go ahead. I might not answer if it’s none of your business.”

“I wasn’t going to ask that. I guess I’ve always sensed that you were angry over something when Dad died. Were you? Can you tell me about it?”

“Your Grandfather transferred the title to the ranch to your Dad rather than to us as husband and wife. That made me angry when I found out about it. On top of that, I tried so hard to get your Dad to stop smoking. I don’t know why you picked up the habit, but I sure wish you would quit before it kills you too.”

“I don’t smoke that much!”

“Then, it should be easy for you to quit.”

“Mona said the same thing.”

“Well?”

“Ok.”

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“I quit smoking.”

“How long has it been?”

“Two days.”

“Let me smell your breath. You did! Good for you.”

Mona and I were married in our church a few weeks later. My Best Man and I had to rent Tuxedos (black tie). Mona's father must be broke if he paid for that wedding dress, it was spectacular. The Maid of Honor wore a floor length gown and looked pretty good too. We had a ring bearer, but no flower girl tossing rose petals down the aisle (she got sick). It was a formal wedding, usually called a White Wedding.

The Best Man and Maid of Honor were each of our best friends from high school. I wonder if she sent Jeff an invitation. Probably not, he still has all of his teeth as far as I know. The reception was held in the Church basement.

I was apprehensive that I'd gone overboard on my wedding gift for Mona. It was a nice string of cultured pearls with matching pearl ear studs. I had to choose between collar, choker, princess, matinee and opera and between a uniform strand and graduated strand. I chose a uniform princess strand of white pearls. She was delighted. In turn, she handed me an envelope containing a card with a number written on it.

"What's this?"

"Oh, you mentioned buying those firearms for your generation of the family and Daddy and I talked it over and bought you one. That's the serial number. You're just going to have to wait until we get home to see what we bought. I'm telling you right now, new husband of mine, if you don't like it, I'll ring your neck. It's custom."

"A custom rifle? Jeez, I hope it's not an AR-15," I thought. I slipped the envelope into her purse. I had to borrow a car because all I had was the pickup and she isn't my cousin. Can you see a bride in a white wedding dress and a man in black tie in a pickup? I didn't think so.

We finally got away from the reception around 8pm. We got out of the fancy dress clothes and put on robes. I asked if I could see my wedding present before we got to the important stuff. It most certainly seemed custom. Springfield Armory doesn't sell a Super Match with a black fiberglass stock and a carbon barrel. Obviously they can build anything you want. They included the test firing target containing one oversized hole.

"Oh, thank you Mona. A Super Match was beyond my wildest dreams."

"There is a box of 25 new USGI 20-round magazines. The scope mount was backordered so you'll have to wait for it to come in to have the scope mounted. It's a Leupold variable power scope (3-9x50mm) that Daddy picked out. We didn't buy you any ammunition. The mount and rings are coming from Arms (A.R.M.S.) and include their #18 mount and the throw lever rings that match the scope."

"Thanks again. You realize that I haven't done what we're about to do before. I don't think I'll have any problem figuring it out though."

“That’s good; I haven’t either. I guess we figure it out together.”

Hey, it’s not rocket science, we did just fine, thank you very much.

“I’m going to finish putting my things away and distribute the wedding gifts to their proper locations after I fix you your first breakfast.”

“I started the coffee and the tea kettle should be getting hot. We’ll hear it when it whistles.”

“Do you always get up this early?”

“No, I slept in and Harry did the milking and feeding the livestock. Normally, I milk the cows around 5am and 5pm.”

“How much did it cost to move their mobile home and get it hooked up to everything?”

“Just the going rate for the move based on a flat charge plus mileage. The plumber was another thing all together. He had to run a water line, a line to the septic system and a line to the propane tank. So, naturally, he had to use a trencher and so forth. Plus they charge a pretty good hourly rate. Before I forget, we don’t have a garbage disposal because of being on septic.

“Excessive dumping of cooking oils and grease can cause the inlet drains to block. Oils and grease are often difficult to degrade and can cause odor problems and difficulties with the periodic emptying. So, don’t pour oil down the drain. Flushing non-biodegradable items like hygiene products such as sanitary napkins and tampons will rapidly fill or clog a septic tank; these materials should not be disposed of in this way. We use Rid-X on the first day of every month.”

“I didn’t know that, thanks for the warning.”

“They just pumped the tank out last month so we’ll be good for a while. If we’re very careful, we won’t need it pumped out often. Anyway, this isn’t an appetizing conversation to be discussing at breakfast time. What’s on the menu?”

“Bacon, eggs and toast.”

It was early summer and the crops were coming up and the female livestock were all mothers-to-be. Harry and I had a discussion about the fencing before he went out to cultivate the corn and soy beans for the first time. Soybeans were a new crop for me. I had been looking into biodiesel production as a way of cutting costs. It looked like it took as much energy to produce it as you got from the finished product. Maybe one of these days.

This year, 1990, was a good year for the most part. We had good crop yields and for the first time I harvested seed to plant the following year. I also picked up some food grade pails, Mylar bags, a sealer and oxygen absorbers. We put up 3 pails of wheat, two of corn and one each of oats and barley. We butchered one of the previous year's feeder cattle and two hogs. We also bought a 25ft³ chest type freezer. We sold the rest, one beef and a lot of hogs.

In a way, producing pork is a money machine. The sows produce two litters per year and it doesn't take that much to get them to market weight. Assuming the sows produce litters with a dozen surviving pigs and the pigs are 50-50 gender wise. Starting with four sows, you could end up with 28 sows after the first birthing. Selecting the four to six best gilts out of each litter and selling the remainder increases the herd and financial income. It's limited by how much space you have and how much feed you can produce. Pigs are omnivores and eat anything. They love the kitchen garbage that Mona throws to them over the fence.

There was that Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska. An SR-71 set a transcontinental speed record of 1 hour 8 minutes 17 seconds. They put up the Hubble telescope and it didn't work. Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The USSR broke up. East and West Germany reunified. We were left hanging by that thing in Kuwait. Big military buildup and it looks like George Bush isn't fooling around. He is going to take names and kick butt.

Let me tell you, it came as a shock when the bombing campaign began on January 17, 1991. And then on February 27, the ground campaign began. It was over almost before it started. One hundred hours! The coalition sort of kicked butts and took names. Oh, they encouraged a Kurdish uprising, but didn't support it and Saddam's Generals did a job on the Kurds.

Then there was that Shi'ite uprising that went unsupported. The rebellions were encouraged by an airing of "The Voice of Free Iraq" on 2 February 1991, which was broadcast from a CIA run radio station out of Saudi Arabia. The Arabic service of the Voice of America supported the uprising by stating that the rebellion was large, and that they soon would be liberated from Saddam.

Bush didn't get Saddam. There was some criticism of the Bush administration, as they chose to allow Saddam Hussein to remain in power instead of pushing on to capture Baghdad and overthrowing his government. Some??? Might cost him the election in 1992...some, hah.

The remainder of 1991 was memorable in some ways and not so in others. A year after the wedding, Mona announced she was late and she drove into town to get one of those drug store pregnancy tests. As a matter of fact, she bought three. If you're raised around livestock and haven't figured out 'the birds and the bees', you're mother has worn herself out trying to cover your eyes or maybe, you're just plain stupid. Mommy can't be there ALL of the time.

So, you must know who the second person to know she was pregnant, right? Her mother since she was first. I guess third isn't too bad, you still get a ribbon or bronze medal. Harry and I were still in the process of moving the wood fence over fifteen feet. We'd later install a woven wire/barbed wire fence fifteen feet the other way creating a thirty foot wide lane. We bought enough wooden posts for the wire fence to have a wooden post as every third post. We used as much of the old fence as possible and some of the new posts for the new wooden fence.

Some of the old posts hadn't had sufficient protection against the weather and needed to be replaced. The same applied to a small portion of the boards. We did as much as time permitted and rigged a barrier between the old fence and new. I'd do the painting on the weekends using a sprayer.

"Guess what?"

"You're pregnant."

"Spoil sport."

"Simple logic one plus one equals three."

"That's not logic, that's math and one plus one equal two."

"Want to rethink that?"

"Oh. Ok, one plus one equals three."

"Or more."

"How's the fence coming?"

"We're putting in about 12 to 15 posts a day. Some of the old posts are pretty much rotted so we'll need more posts eventually. The regular work didn't stop just because we're building a fence. Both Harry and I have been starting at four rather than five and working an hour later in the evenings. And the corn and beans need to be cultivated. I've got his boys James and Harry Jr. working the horses. How are you doing with the garden?"

"I need more jars, rings and lids plus lids for the empty jars from last year."

"Mom says she needs her canner back. There's a place in Utah called Canning Pantry. How about you get an All American 41.5 quart canner? It does something like nineteen quarts and thirty two pints. They sell jars by the case too. What size of lids, regular or wide mouth?"

"Both."

“They sell those by the case too. You’d better get a case of each. They also have pickling spices, tomato sauce mixes, pectin and other supplies. Use the debit card.”

“Are we going to be able to make the loan payment this year?”

“No problem, we can make it. I checked the prime rate and it has fallen 1.5%. Didn’t really have a choice, Julie would have never agreed to an ARM. Anyway, ARMs are generally 3% above prime and that would increase the payment. See if you can find someone who sells ‘Long Term Storage Foods’ and write it down.”

“When are you going to teach me how to shoot so I can get a CCW?”

“How about Sunday afternoon? I’ll do the painting Saturday.”

“It’s a date.”

“Ok, but don’t tell my wife, she’s insanely jealous.”

“What do you want for supper?”

“A cold Coors and some hot food. Lady’s choice.”

“You’re no help.”

“What do you have thawed out?”

“I could probably get steaks thawed in time. Steaks, baked potatoes and a salad?”

“Sounds good. Give me a kiss and get busy.”

“Hey honey, Lincoln freed the slaves.”

“Doesn’t apply to white homemakers.”

“If I wasn’t horny, you’d pay for that. I know what I want for a concealed carry handgun.”

“What?”

“A compact .45ACP.”

“Good. If it turns out to be too much gun for you, you can give it to me and get a 9mm like you should have chosen in the first place. Before we buy you a handgun, you can try all of them in my collection. I suspect I already know what you’ll choose.”

“You’d better get busy too, Harry has the last post tamped.”

“Got them all tamped down solid?”

“As tight as I can get them.”

“Ok, let’s get the boards up and put the barrier back up. It’s getting close to milking time. Want to milk or feed them.”

“You milk, that one cow doesn’t like me and likes to kick.”

“Mona’s pregnant.”

“I’ll tell Maria.”

“It’s not official until she sees the doctor. The testing kits are pretty accurate though.”

“You’ve been married a year, it’s about time. That’s a big old house. You could raise your own football team and put me out of a job.”

“I don’t think so. Two would be about right and three the final straw. Somebody would get clipped after three.”

“Best it be her. If something happened and you decided to have another, it’s easier to hook up her tubes than yours.”

“You never know, maybe some drug company will develop a shot to replace the pill and nobody will need to submit to an invasive procedure.”

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“That’s got it. I’ll get the cows milked.”

“We’re getting low on eggs.”

“Ask Mona. She can give you a tray from the egg case.”

“I’ll tell Maria. I’d probably dump them halfway home.”

“We’re going to be shooting on Sunday afternoon if anyone in your family wants to participate.”

“We might just do that. I bought a used M1A standard model and have been itching to try it out.”

“Really? Mona got me an M1A as my wedding present.”

“Which model?”

“It’s a Super Match with the Douglas barrel and fiberglass stock.”

“Scope?”

“Leupold 3-9x50mm.”

“Nice. Best use Match ammo in that rifle.”

“Oh?”

“Hell yes. It’s the same rifle as their M21.”

It turned out that my custom rifle wasn’t all that custom. Springfield Armory offered the Super Match with the Douglas barrel with your choice of stocks. However, my receiver had both the front and rear lugs...

From 1991 onward, Super Match M1A receivers were manufactured with a rear lug as a standard feature. A front lug was added per customer request. The Super Match M1A was fitted with a 1:10 twist heavyweight Douglas barrel unless the customer selected another brand of barrel. Regardless of the barrel make, the operating rod will slide through an oversized operating rod guide made to fit the barrel’s larger diameter at that area. The buyer also had the choice of an oversized walnut, fancy burley walnut, laminated walnut/maple, McMillan camouflage or black fiberglass stock.

So, I bought a case of Match BTHP ammo in Denver. It was expensive at half the price. On the other hand, it didn’t take all that long after I had the scope fine tuned before I was shooting groups of ½ MOA. I’d have danced a jig, if I’d known how.

Mona started on the Ruger Single Six, graduated to the Ruger Standard and then the Browning Hi-Power. Based on the size of the grin on her face, I knew I’d been right. We went on up through the .38 Special, .357 magnum, both .44 magnums shooting .44 specials and .44 magnums and then the .45 ACP. One shot of .44 magnum from each was all it took to decide the magnums weren’t for her. She tried the M1911A1 a second time and then the Browning.

“This one.”

“That’s what I thought. Colorado, at the moment, is a may issue state. If you jump through the hoops and remain patient, you should be able to get the permit. What do you want for open carry and concealed carry?”

“Why not just this pistol?”

“No reason. You’ll need a purse designed to carry a handgun, probably a Galco.”

“I’d love a new purse.”

“We need to have a serious discussion about some things. How about after supper?”

“What kind of things?”

“Financial matters.”

“Is the purse that expensive?”

“It’s not about the purse, honestly. It’s private and we have an audience so it’ll keep.”

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“Ok, our audience is gone so fill me in.”

“When I signed the land contract, the prime rate was 10%. Good rate for both us at the time. However, the rate is sliding and we’re locked into 10%. It’s not going to bankrupt us or anything. And, you know that last year we paid a double principal payment for a total payment of \$37,800, reducing the unpaid principal to \$140,400.

“I’d like to make a double principal payment again this year. It will total \$35,640. That means it’s going to be tight and we have to watch our spending carefully. In the long run, we’ll save a huge amount of interest. Plus, if we have a bad year, having smaller payments will help.”

“But the interest is deductible, right? That means less taxable income.”

“Yes, it is, thank God.”

“I can wait on the purse. There’s Christmas and my birthday.”

“I knew you’d understand. I can pick ‘em can’t I?”

“I had a say in that too.”

“Yes, of course. We done good.”

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I took her to a dealer and she picked out the purse she wanted and I put it up for her birthday. Her Christmas present was a matching pearl necklace of matinee length. In the end, 1992 produced substantial profits and the double payment wasn’t a problem.

I did buy more Match ammo for my Super Match. And replaced all that we'd shot up during the year. While no Annie Oakley, Mona was becoming a good shot. She didn't mind shooting the M1A, although her weapon of choice was the carbine.

The wooden fence wasn't completed until early fall. We took a different approach to the wire fence. We strung a line and put in the posts at ten foot intervals, two T posts and one wooden post with two wooden posts and a brace at each end. When we were finished, we strung the wire using the Ford to pull it tight. With an addition of a chain link gate for the lane, we were finally finished. Our tax return would show a net loss and we'd get our estimated payments back. With the double principal payments, the principal balance was down to \$118,800.

I called Julie to visit and explain that as long as we were able, we'd be making double principal payments and sometime in February she'd be an aunt. She told me Mom had told her. We discussed the money she was setting aside for the kids' education. She said that the taxes had gobbled up some but the funds were safely tucked away in safe investments in the children's' and her name.

There was that old issue. "Why in the children's and your name?" I asked.

"I told you that Bob considers the land and subsequent land contract to be my business and wants no part of it. I have to pay my share of the taxes. We do that with Turbo Tax, computing the taxes with and without the interest income and I pay the difference."

"And you don't mind the double principal payments?"

"Well, I reread the contract and it only establishes the minimum principal payment. So, I guess you can pay as much principal each year as you can afford."

We chatted a bit more about the kids and Mom and Mac before ending the call. My prediction that Bush not getting Saddam was a mistake had been right on the money. He lost the election and the Governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton, would be our new President.

On February 14, Paul Alan Traherne was born. He weighed 7 pounds 10 ounces and was 20 inches long. I didn't participate in the delivery. He squinted a lot but had all the working parts. Mona said she was going to nurse him so I'd just better get used to the idea. Wow, a boy.

On February 28th, the BATF raided the Branch Davidian compound outside Waco, Texas. That would turn into a siege that lasted almost two months. It seemed to us that the BATF was heavy handed. On April 19, the government attacked and the compound burned with 76 people dying. The crazy Unabomber is still sending mail bombs. It just gets so confusing trying to remember. Rodney King Riots, no, that was 1992. Oh yeah, Ruby Ridge and Blackhawk Down. Oops, Ruby Ridge was 1992 too.

There was a big earthquake in Japan and some disgruntled homemaker clipped her husband big time; cut the whole thing off. Our President said we shouldn't ask and they shouldn't tell. Finally, late in the year, they got the Hubble fixed.

We were up to sixteen breeding sows and six milk cows. Anymore and we'd have to look into a milking machine because milking was taking too long. The spring pig litters produced 194 pigs that survived. We also had six new calves and 24 new foals. One colt in particular caught my eye and I considered keeping him as a stallion.

That new lane sure cut our time to and from the fields. It surely was expensive but we had separate pastures for the livestock and the fencing may pay for itself in the long run because we would have had to replace the posts and boards anyway.

I haven't decided on biodiesel yet. Maybe when the ranch is paid off. You know, work on a farm or ranch is mostly routine hard work. Our horse herd numbered 63 including the 2 stallions. That's a lot of mouths to feed although our field production was enough and more.

When the time came to make the land contract payment, we knew we had to pay \$10,800 in principal and \$11,880 in interest. We had a shade over forty grand in the bank and decided we would just notch the belt a little tighter and double pay the principal again. Our payment, totaling \$33,480, brought the principal balance down to \$97,200 or slightly more than half the purchase price.

Paul was almost able to pull himself up on my recliner by Thanksgiving and had accomplished it by Christmas. He got Christmas presents. Most were things he needed anyway, like clothing. A couple of inexpensive toys and a teddy bear made his first Christmas a happy event. Due to our belt tightening, I didn't get Mona the pearl choker I had hoped to get her and she didn't tell me what she didn't buy for me. I suspected it went bang.

We were taking precautions to prevent having two children in diapers and agreed we'd wait until late 1994 before we tried to increase our family with number two. Ninety four was the first time our home computer was connected to the outside world. The VP was pushing an information superhighway. No, he didn't invent it even if he did claim credit. It was strictly dialup using a 28.8k modem. LA had a big earthquake that was even worse than Loma Prieta. Then, in his first State of the Union address, Clinton called for an Assault Weapons Ban.

"What does he mean by 'Assault Weapons Ban'?"

"I'm not sure. Obviously, he's referring to military style rifles like the AR-15 and those imported AK types and SKS. I don't know why he would want to limit the magazine capacity. The Super Match is really just an upgrade M-14 semi-auto only rifle. But if they're going to assign point values to each feature and limit the total, I could have a problem. If we're going to do anything about it, we'd better get it done before the law is

passed and signed. One thing we can do is get some of those 30-round AR-15 magazines and put them up.

“I don’t believe it will affect pump shotguns. Rather than take a chance, maybe we should buy the Mossberg. We’ll also get the Beretta 92FS and some of the military magazines.”

“Do you want to buy an AR-15 too?”

“I guess we’d better because that will round out the collection. We might only make a single principal payment this year instead of a double. That law might not pass either and we’ll have accelerated our weapons acquisition program over nothing. The conservative approach to take would be to assume the law passes.”

Mona and I went shopping and allowed Grandma to spend the day with her Grandson. At least, that’s what we told her. We had the extra money from the sale of two non-gelded 3-year-old colts and it was more than enough for what we wanted. We located a dealer in Denver who seemed to specialize in military arms. That’s not all he sold, but he represented Springfield Armory, Colt, Beretta and Mossberg among others.

It was one stop shopping. We selected two 590A1s, a Colt AR-15, a Beretta 92FS and bought extra magazines so we had a total of 25 for the Colt and 7 for the Beretta. We added a side saddle, butt cuff and fifteen round slings plus swivels to the shotguns. We got the Bianchi UM-84 Universal Military Holster in Olive Drab.

He had Remington 3” 15-pellet 00 buckshot on sale along with 3” Brenneke Black Magic 1³/₈” slugs. The Brenneke slugs were imported. We bought 2 cases of each since they were marked down substantially. I asked when they were planning a sale on #4 buckshot but the salesman didn’t know.

We didn’t spend all of the horse money; close but not all. But that also included stopping by a surplus store and getting full sets of ALICE gear with stainless canteen, cup and stove, ET and cover, twin ammo pouches, belt and suspenders. The standard issue canteen was plastic but we wanted and got stainless. About the only things we didn’t get was a mess kit or pack.

The US military had adopted the Meal-Ready-to-Eat. There were about four companies producing them and they also made civilian versions. I tried one once and didn’t really care for it. In a pinch, it was way better than nothing. They came in several different varieties and maybe I just happened to get one that wasn’t as good as the others.

“You know, Mona, we’ve been putting up pails of grain every year. I just realized that we don’t have a grinder. And oats are flaked and we don’t have a flaker. Did Canning Pantry include a catalog with that order?”

“Yes they did. I looked through it and they have all kinds of things including both of those. There is about every kind of widget and gadget a person could want. I’m glad we have that huge canner. It’s really heavy fully loaded, but it’s so much faster and most days, I don’t have to do more than one or two loads.”

“If we’re going to store large amounts of food, we really should have a root cellar. We have the storm shelter in case of tornadoes and we could probably use that.”

“I’ve never been in it. What’s it like?”

“It’s big, maybe ten foot square. It’s mounded over with soil maybe six foot thick where it’s thinnest. There’s a slanted door at the top of the stairs, the stairs and another door at the bottom landing. The top door opens out and the bottom door opens in. Let’s see, it’s lined with two by twelve treated planking and there’s a support beam running left to right to support the ceiling planks that run from front to back. It has a dirt floor and intake and outlet vents. I’m not so sure that Grandpa didn’t use it as a root cellar, now that I think about it. It doesn’t have any shelving and that’s why I always assumed it was a storm cellar.”

“Didn’t your Dad or Mom ever tell you?”

“Grandpa died when I was seven and Dad died when I was twelve. You know, I can’t remember ever going down there except when there was a tornado warning.”

“Have you ever heard of a guy named Kurt Saxon or read the book ‘Life After Doomsday’ by Bruce Clayton?”

“I haven’t read the books, for sure. I’ve heard the name Kurt Saxon although I can’t recall in what context.”

“Saxon is a self-described Survivalist. Clayton’s book was focused on a possible nuclear war. You know way back in 1962, we had that Cuban Missile Crisis. Dad has some books on the subject and he lived through it. He’s told me that we were lucky we didn’t go to war with Cuba because it would have ended up being a nuclear war.”

“Is your father a survivalist?”

“I suppose so although there’s another term I’ve heard him use, ‘Prepper’. They have a real shelter in the backyard, food stored in the shelter and the basement, a firearms collection that rivals yours and an unusual lighting system. It’s all 12vdc and runs off of a battery bank that he can recharge with a small China Diesel generator.

Their air filtration system and blast valves were a more recent addition. There is a company in Utah named Utah Shelter Systems and they’ve been in business since 1987. They sell shelters of their own design and also sell shelter equipment separately. My

father bought a LUWA Andair AG filter model VA 150 with 3 bar (a centimeter-gram-second unit, an SI unit) blast valves. If you're serious about this, talk to him."

"Let's pickup Paul and stop by your parents so they can see him too. I'll talk to your father and get some ideas of what we're facing."

"Stop at the next service station and I'll call ahead to confirm."

"What did they say?"

"Come on down and have dinner with them. My father loves to talk on the subject of prepping. How much will be available this year to start the project?"

"That \$10,800 for sure and possibly more."

"Did he give you any trouble?"

"He's a very good little boy when you're firm with him. Planning on another?"

"The next will probably be born next year; we're going to wait a while before we try for the second."

"Find everything you were looking for?"

"Sure did. Thanks Mom."

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"He's sure grown."

"He's pulling up on furniture and will be walking soon. I'm not sure when he'll figure out the potty chair. I like to talk to you when you can spare a few minutes about 'Preps'."

"A subject near and dear to my heart. Tell me what you done up until now."

"Mona cans and we have over a year supply canned goods. I've been saving up 6 gallon pails of wheat, corn, oats and barley. It's the same each year, three pails of wheat, two of corn and one each of oats and one of barley."

"Do you can any meat?"

"We have a freezer."

"You should still can meat. It makes for a quick meal and doesn't depend of a generator to it keep frozen. Supper will be awhile so let me show you our preps. We can start in the basement."

“You have a lot of food.”

“Everything combined, at least ten years for three people. The shelter is connected to the basement.”

John picked up a garage remote and pressed the button. A cabinet on the far wall began to roll to the right. Behind the cabinet was a blast door.

“The power for the motors to drive the cabinet comes from the battery bank in the shelter. Let me get this door open and we’ll walk down the tunnel to the shelter. There’s a slight downward slope because the shelter floor is nineteen feet deep.”

The tunnel was lighted by small bulbs, probably those 12vdc. At the bottom of the ramp, there was another door. In front of it was a landing with a floor drain. Above the floor drain was a shower head.

“This is the decontamination area. The locker contains some light weight coveralls that you can switch into after you’re completely decontaminated. The door is identical to the one above. We could have gotten by with a single door. I wanted the protection of two and each is rated at 3 bar in case of a nuke attack.”

He opened the door to a good sized shelter.

“The shelter has 1,600ft² floor space and a 9’ ceiling. It’s poured concrete ten inches thick because of the blast door in the wall and overhead. Above the overhead is 120 inches of compacted earth. Care to guess the protection factor of the shelter?”

“I have no idea. It’s probably high.”

“Yep, it’s about 29 million. The overhead is supported by those steel I-beams to support the weight of the concrete, the ground above it and any blast pressure. That’s half inch steel plate supporting the ten inches of concrete and it’s welded to the I-beams for added rigidity. Believe it or not, those ½ steel plates raised the protection factor from 22 million to 29 million.

“You must have a bunch of money in this setup.”

“Not as much as you think; after all I am a general contractor. There is a master bedroom and two bunk rooms each capable of supporting 6 males or 6 females. There’s a ¾ bath over there and you can see the kitchen. The door behind you is the access to the generator room while the door to your front is the door to the storage room where we store food, equipment and my armory.”

“Mona said that you had an armory that rivals ours.”

"It's not that large in terms of numbers. There are six select fire G-3s, six select fire Steyr AUG bullpups, one M21 and a Barrett M82A1M. We also have some M1911 style pistols and 12 gauge pumps. For PAW hunting, we have two 10/22s and two Remington Express Combos.

We have a large supply of ammo, load bearing equipment, 14 MSA Millennium gas masks with the voice boxes and other accessories like extra lenses and so forth plus one unit for a baby and one for a child. The Tyvek protection suits are level B and there are boots, gloves and tape. That storage room contains enough food for sixteen people for one year. Both use the same method of construction as the shelter."

"You built that for a small China Diesel generator?"

"We've upgraded. I'm now running a Koehler 30kw with an output of 125 amps of prime power. We have a dual lighting system now, 12vdc running off the batteries and regular house wiring, 110vac. The China Diesel is mostly for backup."

"Since we're just outside of town, I was able to put in a Containment Solutions 30,000 gallon diesel tank and bought and buried a 10,000 gallon propane tank. The gas tank is much smaller, 2,000 gallons. The farm tank you see on the stand holds 500 gallons of kerosene. We use Product Research, Inc. fuel stabilizers. That table over there is the ham shack and the grounded cabinet contains the radios, radiation equipment and medical supplies."

"Wow."

"You were expecting a smaller shelter built of concrete block, I'll bet."

"I'm not really sure what I expected, but not this."

"What brought this up? You said you store some grain in six gallon pails and there are boxes of home canned goods in your basement."

"I observed that despite having grain stored we didn't have a grinder or flaker. Anyway, that started the conversation. There is a small storm shelter which I now believe may have been a root cellar at some time in the past. We bought some canning supplies from Canning Pantry and they sent along a catalog. Mona says they have a large line of products."

"They do. Reasonable prices, too. It's the shipping that makes what you buy expensive. We buy from them, Emergency Essentials, Walton Feed, Nitro Pak and Mountain House. We have the money to spend and have been at this for quite a while. If you're thinking about putting in a real shelter, talk to me before you do it. If it happens that we're in between jobs or things are slow, I might be able to help you out with the labor. You'd still have to pay for the materials though. You just might have something to compensate me for the labor."

“Thanks John, we’ll talk about it. What kind of compensation?”

“You raise beef, pork and chicken. You have horses and tack. We might be able to barter. Maybe like keeping us in meat and eggs. Maybe some horses with tack that you keep and feed. How many are there living on your ranch at present?”

“Seven. There are three of us plus Harry Hanson and his family totaling four.”

“You’d need seven hundred square feet of useable space. That’s 100ft² per person. Personally, I wouldn’t go less than 1,000 to 1,200ft² not including the storage room or generator room. There’s nothing much stirring in the world at the moment so you wouldn’t have to do it all at once.”

Would You Rather... Three

New Preppers.

“That’s quite the shelter your father has. It’s spacious, well stocked and very well equipped.”

“Yes, Mom said that he added a 30kw diesel generator.”

“He told me about it but we didn’t look at it. Your family must be pretty well off. That wedding wasn’t inexpensive and neither was my wedding present. That shelter must have set him back a bunch.”

“It was expensive I’ll admit, but not as expensive as you may imagine. He guarantees every employee 40 hours of pay even if they’re not working. He claims that if they’re not working, it’s his poor planning and not their fault. So, it was constructed when they’d just be sitting around, due to his poor planning. I’m not so sure it was all poor planning, if you must know.”

“There is a lot of concrete in that shelter.”

“I know. USS gives the criteria to properly install their blast doors and that required ten inch thick walls. One door would probably be enough if a person were to put a good steel door in the basement wall. You would connect the shelter to the basement, wouldn’t you?”

“I hadn’t thought about it. Yes, probably because that would conceal the shelter entrance. If we built a shelter, we’d have our people protected. We make our living raising livestock. We’d have to find some way to protect them too. I doubt that they sell nuclear war insurance and if they did, who would be around to collect from?”

“Are you aware of earth sheltering?”

“Your Dad said there was ten feet of earth above the shelter. It has a protection factor of something like 29 million.”

“Same idea, but different. That big old barn is still pretty solid isn’t it?”

“Like a tank.”

“Hear me out on this. What if you were to dismantle the barn and use the materials to construct it in a different fashion? Sort of a dome shape that you could coat with a preservative, like tar, and cover it with six feet of earth. Two inches of wood and 6 feet of earth would give you a protection factor close to ten thousand. The barn is all rough sawn 2” wood isn’t it?”

“It is and that’s why I called it a tank. Honey, it would be a lot of work and it would take Harry, his boys and me years to dismantle it and rebuild it.”

“I know. Are you aware that there’s a market for used wood? It frequently sells for multiples over the price of new wood. I’m just speculating here so don’t hold me to it; I believe you could get enough money from the old wood to put in a concrete dome for the livestock. You might even be able to find a used wood dealer willing to dismantle the barn just to get the wood for little or no cost to us.”

“You should check that out.”

“Ok. You should also think about connecting the shelter to the new dome so, if needed, we could tend to the livestock. We could get Daddy to build the shelter and sub the dome.”

“I’m with you so far but what about air filtration for the barn? The livestock would need clean air the same as we would.”

“When Daddy was shopping for an air filtration system, he found an Israeli firm that manufactured large units sold through an American dealer. You’d have to ask him; I think the company is in Washington or Oregon.”

“I was just thinking about the dome idea. You know a dome with a radius of sixty feet would also be sixty feet high. If the internal structure were properly designed and built, we could have the stories connected by ramps. We could have horses on the first story, hogs on the second story, the beef on the third story, chickens on the fourth and store hay in the twenty feet above the chickens.”

“Ten foot stories?”

“That was what I was thinking. I allocated the floors based on how much of each kind of livestock we have. We have an ongoing herd above sixty horses most times, and when the sows farrow, a lot of hogs. We haven’t been increasing the beef herd all that much and the chickens are small.”

“So, you’re interested?”

“I’m curious to say the least. We could probably invest \$12,000 a year in a shelter project by not making double principal payments. We could barter with your father for the labor.”

“Yes we could. The shelter wouldn’t go in our backyard though. That would put the house between the shelter and the barn. It will have to go to the side of the house directly across from the location of the dome. Something just occurred to me. I said he could sub the dome. He might just hire an experienced dome crew and expand his line of contracting services.”

After we got home and I had free time, I made some calculations. Using the formula for the area of a circle, I found that a sixty foot radius would produce an area of 11,310 square feet; way too big. After a few calculations, I determined that a 40 foot radius produced over five thousand square feet which would be about equal to 50 times one hundred foot area which should be enough for the horses. A dome of those dimensions would have space for the livestock but none for feed.

The tunnel connecting the shelter to the barn would be buried deep and perhaps a basement for the barn and another ramp would work. It would give the livestock more space, an extra five thousand plus square feet and make room for hay on the top twenty feet. It wasn't so much an engineering problem as a matter of careful reflection. As it was, we'd have to put in a set of stairs to get from the tunnel bottom up to the barn basement. This would last for centuries so we'd better put in steel stairs. Centuries? Where did that come from?

The next afternoon, I called John. "John, Mona and I continued discussing the subject. I raised a point about the livestock and we eventually got around to discussing a monolithic dome. I did some calculations and a dome with a forty foot radius would be about perfect for our operation. What do you think?"

"I don't build domes."

"I realize that. Mona observed that you could hire a crew of trained dome builders and expand your business. She also thought that the job could be given to a sub. The dome could be covered with earth six feet thick."

"Then you're serious about this?"

"Yes. The more I think about it, the more serious I get. With the USSR breaking up, the Cold War may be over. On the other hand China seems to be an emerging power and they have nukes too. It would be an awfully expensive storm shelter, but there are all kinds of potential disasters. If I remember something my Science teacher said correctly, Yellowstone caldera is overdue for another eruption.

"We would only have about \$12,000 per year to invest. We could barter you all the beef, pork, chicken and eggs you want. You could have your choice of our geldings with their tack. Maybe I could write them off as advertising or something."

"You sound serious. You've given this some thought?"

"That was joint project and we put our heads together to come up with ideas. That barn may be old but it was built like a tank with rough sawn two inch lumber. Mona thinks we could sell the barn to a used lumber dealer and get quite a bit for it. That money could be added to what we'd have available at the end of the year. Around spring next year, we could begin working on the project."

“My daughter and grandson live on the ranch. You won’t have to worry too much about me making contributions to improve their safety. If you pay for the materials, all I’m out are the labor costs. I’d only have to put one crew on the project and I could absorb that cost. Waiting until next spring will give me a year to figure out what to do about the dome. I know who I could sub, an outfit in Texas. I need to think about it some, though.”

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“I have a question.”

“Yes?”

“If we tear down the barn, how are you going to shelter the horses?”

“I’ve been thinking about that. We could erect permanent shelters using poles and galvanized corrugated metal panels out in the pasture. They would provide shade from the sun and cover from rain. More importantly, they wouldn’t be all that expensive to put up. It would take little time or labor and only four or five poles per structure and some framing lumber to support the roof.”

“Could they winter over out there?”

“Probably. It wouldn’t be my first choice. Ideally, the barn would be dismantled between March 1st and June 1st next year. It would be ideal timing for the construction to begin around June 1st. We’ll have one principal payment of \$10,800 socked away and more. I told John we’d have \$12,000 plus the proceeds from selling the wood. Hopefully that will cover all the building materials costs.

“With that many animals in the dome, we’ll need dehumidifiers and maybe some air conditioning. They generate a lot of moisture and heat. We’re talking 100 large animals plus the chickens.”

“Besides the construction materials, we’ll need the two air cleaners with blast valves and filters. I don’t know what a Koehler generator costs; probably somewhere between ten and fifteen thousand, installed. I also think we’d be better off moving the large freezer to the shelter storage room and replace it with an upright in the basement.

“We’ll need bunks beds like those in your family’s shelter. We could move the old master bedroom furniture to the shelter and replace it with new. John said that the radio equipment and radiological equipment was in a grounded cabinet. I think I’ll take three Tylenol and go to bed. My head is swimming and I’m developing a headache.”

“Alan, slow down. You’re trying to do it too fast and you’re going to drive yourself nuts. For now concentrate on the shelter and the new barn. I can work with Mom and develop a phased in approach to equipping the shelter. I’m sure Dad will have some good ideas

about constructing the dome. A journey of a thousand miles begins with but a single step and you've made that step by deciding to get involved with preparing. Above all else, keep the plans flexible. Although the barn will contain all of the animals, let's keep the beef, hogs and chickens where they are for now."

"Ok. Where's the Tylenol?"

"Medicine cabinet."

As I tried to drift off to sleep, I realized that those double principal payments had made funding this project much easier. Our three car garage was detached and wouldn't be in the way. My last thought was to set a deadline to finish it up before 2000.

"You were sleeping so sound I hated to wake you up."

"I had some trouble getting to sleep. I agree about putting the shelter on the side of house. This old house is pretty much square so it doesn't really have ends; just sides and corners. We don't use the front porch and the back door is the primary entrance. It's actually on the side of the house perpendicular to the front side and faces the buildings. I'd like to see this accomplished before 2000. I'm glad now we made the double payments, the interest will be less than \$10,000 per year."

"The first step I plan to take is double buying when I get groceries. It will mostly be sale items that are a normal part of our diet. I haven't tried home canning pasta sauce and I'm going to get Mom's recipe. We should also get a membership for that discount warehouse in Denver."

Mona found a used lumber dealer that would buy the lumber from the barn. He would dismantle it, lowering the price slightly to reflect his costs. He was buying it by the board foot and planning on sawing the two by twelve's into one by twelve's. It would still have one aged rough sawn side showing. It was a big barn with much of the lumber in near pristine condition given its age.

Even at his wholesale buying price, we got a lot of money for the barn. They didn't want to wait and began dismantling it almost immediately. Harry, his boys and I hurriedly erected the shelters in the horse pasture. With the money in hand from the sale of the barn, we gave John the green light to do the shelter and tunnel to the new dome.

I helped Mona modify the old storm shelter into a proper root cellar. I hadn't really seen a lot of John because, frankly, I was afraid of him. He always gave me 'the eye' when I picked up Mona for a date. That changed some when he walked her down the aisle. It changed a lot more when Paul came along. He was downright friendly as opposed to being civil. When the decision was made to become Preppers, I swear that he became my best friend. And while money came slowly from the ranch, he was literally rolling in it.

John had Monolithic Domes of Texas design and install the dome barn per the specifications he and I developed. Just after the crops were harvested, the horses were moved to their new home. I'll have to say that John didn't cut corners or scrimp; we now had a milking machine set up to handle 30 cows. For the moment, the horses were housed on the first floor. While the flooring was concrete with a stiff brush finish it presented problems. In time, the horses walking up and down the aisles would wear the concrete smooth. The stalls had to have some kind of flooring anyway.

The final decision was made to cover the entire floor of the horse level with $\frac{3}{4}$ " rubber mats. Walls were erected inside to conceal the slope of the dome. We could access the area behind the walls for storage and used it to store the tack, a farrier shop, vet supplies and even feed supplements. There was more than enough unused space to allow expansion. We only did that on the first level.

Our shelter had two bedrooms and two bunk rooms. It seemed larger than we discussed so I got a tape and measured it. John snuck one by us; our shelter was bigger than theirs, fifty by forty or 2,000 square feet. The storage room was slightly larger than theirs and the generator he installed was Kohler all right. But, it wasn't a 30kw. It was actually a 60kw single phase unit. I read the book and it would put out 200 amps plus of prime power. I checked the ATS and it, too, was a 200 amp. The ranch's power feed line had been buried and connected directly to a heavy ATS. A new service panel was in the power room and one set of breakers fed the house and shelter while the other set fed the other buildings.

Clinton signed the new federal assault weapons ban on September 13th.

"We need to go talk to your Father and Mother."

"Is something wrong? You look upset."

"I am upset. The shelter is bigger than planned, the generator is double the size of your Father's and that store room is better stocked than it should be. Darn it, it's half full and it's bigger than the one they have."

"I'm sorry Alan, I couldn't say no."

"You knew about this?"

"Please don't be angry with me. Yes, I knew about it and did nothing to encourage them. I tried to talk both of them out of what they did and neither would listen so I gave up. Daddy did say they'd like four geldings with tack. He went on to say that we could continue to make single principal payments and repay him, if we insisted."

"How much did they spend?"

"Less than you think, he's a contractor, remember."

“It was probably more than you think, too, Mona. For example, that gun safe in the storage room is brand spanking new and the largest size the company makes. I suppose that it’s filled with several new guns, too.”

“Not yet.”

“Yet?”

“Yes. At the moment it has all of the guns you and I own stored in it. He said he plans to add a few new firearms to his safe and would be double buying to stock us too. Uh, there’s more ammo for your M1A. He increased your supply for every rifle to 6,000 rounds and every shotgun and handgun to 2,000 rounds. He buys in volume and gets ammo just slightly above cost.”

“Are they home?”

“Yes, I just talked to Mom.”

“Get Paul around and let’s go.”

“Don’t start a fight.”

“I won’t, I promise. But John and I are going to discuss this. You have no idea how it makes me feel. Inadequate doesn’t begin to describe it.”

I was steamed. As I thought about it, I came to realize how much better off we were in terms of protection. Doing it on our own would have taken years. The drive over occurred in total silence as Mona glanced at me while I worked it out in my head.

“You’ll stay for supper, of course. June just started the potatoes in the oven and we have some nice top sirloins.”

“You knew we were coming?”

“I called Mom and gave her a heads up.”

“You’ve looked it all over by now and noticed the changes we made, right?”

“As a matter of fact, yes.”

“And, you’re steaming. You’re angry because of what was done and feeling inadequate.”

“I was when we left. I thought about it and I’m down to being upset.”

“Let me set your mind to ease about a few things and upset you with more. The supplies in your storeroom aren’t new. They’re our supplies. We rotated, lock, stock and barrel. I’d wanted to do it for some time and didn’t have anyone to give or sell the LTS foods to. Everything is dated and good for a minimum of fifteen years.

“I made the shelter bigger because, despite appearances and the setup, our shelter was only intended for three, Mona, June and me. When Mona pointed out that your collection included lever action rifles and single action handguns, I bought several new Ruger SAA revolvers and a complete collection of Marlin lever action rifles. It occurred to me that you had me at a disadvantage.”

“In what way?”

“Well, not directly at a disadvantage, maybe indirectly. The single action firearms and lever action rifles originally used black powder cartridges. I bought the magnum calibers and also bought the black powder calibers. I can reload, but there a limit to how many components I want to store. I bought a few blocks of lead and casting equipment to make bullets. Pyrodex is a good black powder substitute and I simply increased my supply of primers and loading dies.

“The gun safe is new and I bought it to protect Paul and any more children you might have. I have some guns that haven’t come in yet. Some are for you and Mona and some for Paul. If you have another child, I intend to buy more. The combination to the gun safe is in that storage cabinet with the radio equipment and radiation equipment. I gave you the stuff I got from KI4U and replaced it with stuff from Arrow Tech. The stuff I gave you includes the AMP 200 from Arrow Tech that we had. It’s a high reading Geiger counter that goes up to 10,000 Rads. You look like you need a drink. Coors ok?”

“Uh...”

“Right, I’ll be right back.”

“How’s it going Daddy?”

“He just said ‘Uh...’. I think he is in shock. And, I haven’t got to the good stuff yet.”

I was sitting there thinking how inadequate my inspection had been. I hadn’t looked in the cabinet. I intended to, but got upset before I got that far. And then, I began to wonder what else he’d done that I didn’t know about. I was shaking my head when he returned with the beers.

“Here you go. Salute.”

“Uh, salute.”

“Are you ready for the rest or should I stop now?”

“There’s more?”

“A bit.”

“Go ahead.”

“The diesel tank I have is 30,000 gallons, the largest they made at the time. The largest they make now is 40,000 gallons and more is better since the generator uses more fuel.”

“Why 60kw?”

“The service panel in your well house is a 200 amp panel. We used that as a guide. Didn’t you know that?”

“Nope.”

“Of course you knew I added an additional Propane tank, right?”

“You did?”

“All you have is that 3,000 gallon tank.”

“Above ground. There is another 3,000 gallon tank below ground and they’re plumbed together.”

“Really? I didn’t know that. Be that as it may, I added a new tank, buried of course. I may come to you to get propane.”

“How big of a tank?”

“It’s a used recertified 30,000 gallon tank and it’s as full as they’ll fill it.”

“Wait a minute; did you fill the diesel tank too?”

“Naturally. That was a rather large check, but we can afford it. The company paid for it and technically the contents and tank belong to the company. The same applies to the propane tank and propane. They’re set up on the books as remote storage locations. That’s why the propane tank has a wet leg and you have a diesel/gasoline pump. The gas tank is small, only 4,000 gallons. We emptied your two farm tanks and refilled them with kerosene.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“You will pick out four good horses, won’t you?”

“Our best. Plus a beef and two hogs a year forever. You have a lifetime supply of chicken and eggs, too. Do you want milk?”

“Not now. Maybe later. Now, about paying us back.”

“It will be limited to \$10,800 per year for sure.”

“Please let me finish. The problem with our government is they tax a person to death. And then when you die, they take a portion of the estate. Doing what we’ve done amounts to tax avoidance, which is sometimes legal and sometimes not. That’s why the company technically owns the fuel and tanks. It also owns the generator because power is needed for the fuel pumps. Those pumps aren’t three phase; they’re single phase. It’s no big deal. The pump is driven by an electric motor and you can get single or three phase motors.

“What I’m trying to say is, you don’t owe anything. You put good money up front and it covered the special items like the blast doors and the AV 150. We made a gift of \$20,000 to the two of you to cover most of the other material costs. We will continue to make a gift of \$20,000 per year to the two of you until everything is covered. It’s perfectly legal and avoids a lot of inheritance taxes. The twenty grand will be applied to the balance of the loan, including interest. We can’t do it interest free, it’s illegal. We’ll use the minimum rate required by the IRS, six percent.”

“Thank you.”

“Glad to do it, believe me.”

That was all I could think to say. I was literally dumbstruck. My mind was racing, trying to come with a figure representing how much they must have spent.

“Care for another beer?”

“I’m sorry, did you say something?”

“I asked if you wanted another beer.”

“Oh, sorry, no thank you.”

“Perhaps something a little stronger?”

“Ah, I’ve never had anything stronger than 3.2 Coors except at our wedding when we had Champagne.”

“You definitely need something, I’ll be right back.”

“How’s he doing?”

“Total shock and dumbstruck to boot. I could almost hear the gears churning while his mind raced. He needs something else to concentrate on. Which do think he’d prefer, Rye, bourbon, Jack, Canadian or scotch?”

“I’ve never seen him drink anything stronger than 3.2 except at our wedding.”

“Ok, bourbon and branch then.”

“Wait. Give him Canadian and ginger ale.”

“Break him in easy?”

“Yes. Did you mention the truck?”

“I plumb forgot. One drink won’t get him drunk with supper on top of it.”

“Ok Daddy, but only one.”

“Hey kid, that old truck and I have a history. It was my first six passenger pickup, a 19 and 63 Dodge Crew Cab with four wheel drive. Small engine, too, one hundred and seventy cubic inches. “

John came back in carrying two glasses of something. He handed me one and I took a sip. It was ginger ale, but it had something in it. It really didn’t taste bad. Then, he flipped me a key ring.

“Those are the keys to your new truck.”

“New truck?”

“Well, new to you. It’s 1963 Dodge Crew Cab with four wheel drive.”

“It’s older than I am.”

“True, but it’s well cared for. It has a few advantages being old like it is. One is that if there happened to be an EMP, a few parts would get it running in short order. It came with an alternator but when that burned out, I had it replaced with a good old fashioned 1962 generator. Engine was rebuilt last year and it has about 6,000 miles on it. Road miles, not Sunday Go To Meeting miles. There’s a box of spare parts in the back seat with plugs, points, condenser, rotor, cap, thermostat and a set of plug wires.”

“What’s an EMP?”

“Electro Magnetic Pulse. Nukes produce a surge of electricity when they detonate. If they’re detonated at high altitude, they can wipe out most electrical items attached to long wires that aren’t protected. You may have noticed that all the new wiring is in grounded conduit.”

“Thank you again.”

“That was my first six passenger pickup. You treat her good and she’ll treat you good. Not much to break on the older vehicles.”

“John, I’m a bit overwhelmed here. I can’t think of anything to say except thank you and that you’ll get everything I promised you. Our four best geldings with their tack which is nearly new plus the beef and pork. If you store your own grain, we produce corn, oats, wheat and barley and you’re welcome to as much as you need.”

“I noticed you didn’t say want.”

“It’s our livelihood. A few bushels more or less wouldn’t be missed. More would be.”

“I think Mona did well you latching onto you. You’re young and inexperienced in some things. You have an open mind and are willing to learn. Most of all, you know to just say thank you at the appropriate times. I take that as having good common sense. June tells me that Mona told her that you were the more reserved of the two of you and never got involved in inappropriate behavior for an unmarried couple.”

“I guess it was just the way my folks raised me. My mother remained a widow until I turned of age. I knew her new husband from a young age and he’s a good man. He’s slowing down due to his age, but that’s to be expected.”

“Supper’s ready...”

“Let’s wash up and eat.”

That wasn’t plain ginger ale as I said and I still had half a glass left. I might have gulped it down had it been plain. I sure wasn’t going to gulp a mixed drink on an empty stomach. We washed up and sat down to a nice dinner; charcoal grilled steaks, a baked potato and Caesar salad.

“The car seat is in our pickup. Why don’t you drive it and I’ll drive the new old pickup home?”

“Ok. You lead, I’ll follow.”

It really wasn’t that much of a drive since we weren’t very far outside town. It was a five minute drive. Mona unstrapped Paul and handed him to me. She got her purse and we went in to put Paul in bed.

Looking back on it, I'm sure that's the night that Mona got pregnant with our second child. We were in fact able to make a double principal payment, bringing the balance down from \$97,200 to \$75,600. All in all 1994 had been a very busy year and that's a major understatement.

The following year began with the Republican Party being in control of both houses of Congress. Later that month, Norway launched a rocket that Russia first thought was an attack. Yeltsin had the nuclear suitcase in hand but didn't launch. The new airport they were building in Denver was opened and Stapleton closed.

There was a gas attack in a Tokyo subway using Sarin. Selena was killed by the President of her fan club. In mid-April, a huge bomb blew up the federal building in Oklahoma City killing 168 people. Within 90 minutes, they had a suspect in custody. A few days later the Unabomber struck again. And, some guy stole a tank and ran it around on San Diego streets. Superman broke his neck and was paralyzed from the neck down.

An F-16 was shot down over Bosnia. The pilot was rescued six days later. Kobe, Japan had an earthquake and China attacked Taiwan with missiles. We bought a new computer that had the Windows 95 operating system and a much better modem.

When that lawyer said, 'If the glove don't fit, you can't convict', he got OJ acquitted. I think he was guilty as sin. Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated late in the year. Those were some of the high and low points around the year 1995 around the world.

Dean John Traherne was born on the Fourth of July. The crops were looking good and we decided to keep the heifers born since we could milk 30 cows. The boar needed to be replaced so we shopped around and bought a much younger one. The one we had was turned into sausage except for the loins which became Canadian bacon and the tenderloins which became breaded tenderloins. They wet rendered the extra lard and we put it up in the freezer.

Harry Jr. graduated from high school and asked if I was willing to hire him full time to tend to the horses. Mona and I discussed it and since the herd had grown to 75 head, we hired him. He later began to apprentice with the farrier. Farriers are frequently school trained before they apprentice but Harry Jr. had worked with the farrier for a while already and was actually fairly well skilled. We monitored his skills and in 1996, enrolled him in the ELPO Farrier School in Penrose, Colorado for the eight week course. He did very well in school and was eligible for the next course a year later.

But back to family matters. Dean was like Alan in terms of working parts and again Mona nursed him. His big brother was potty trained and only had a few accidents. We got him cowboy shirts, roper boots, jeans and a hat. Grandpa saw to it that he had the belt and buckle. Grandpa also purchased another single six and a 9422. As a matter of fact, he bought a pair of each. Mona loved Dean but truly wanted a daughter. We agreed to try one more time two years in the future.

Our crops produced well above expectations and we stored the grain until the glut was over to get better prices. We butchered two steers and four hogs, selling the other steers and keeping the heifers. We also sold 26 horses including 8 mares and 18 geldings, all with tack. One of our selling points had always been that we included quality, well fitted saddles and bridles. We made a nominal profit on the tack due to our buying power.

We had a small garden this year and Maria did the weeding, harvesting and canning. She shanghaied which ever boy was closest, to put the canner on the stove and take it back off. We just about evenly divided the garden output between us and Harry's family. They also got a side of beef and a hog. The grain moved before the first of the year and we made a double principal payment plus the interest, bringing the loan balance down from \$75,600 to \$54,000. We'd have the loan paid off in two more years, or sooner, depending on ranch profits. The total payment had been \$29,160.

I made a point to spend time with Paul to overcome the amount of attention Dean was receiving. John joined me in that. My mother raised the question if we were planning on stopping at two or going to try for a daughter. Mona's response tickled her when she said, "One more time in about two years."

John's purchases had been placed in the gun safe and he observed that it was a fine collection. He told me he didn't like the AR-15 because its operating system. They were, he said a good light rifle if you could keep them clean enough. His purchase of the AUGs overcame came that deficiently because the AUGs use a gas piston. He had started to acquire large capacity magazines for both rifles, the 100 round Beta C for the AUGs and HK 50-round drum magazines for the G3A3s.

When Christmas rolled around, I was able to get Mona both the choker and the collar strand. She gave me a Glock 21 and a Glock 30 with ankle holster and ankle dual magazine pouch. John and June had a nice selection of Christmas presents for the children. They gave me spare magazines and a paddle style holster for the G21 and a pair of dual paddle style magazine pouches. Mona received the opera string of pearls, giving her the full five strings.

John slipped me a piece of paper showing the interest they would report to the IRS so we could deduct it on our tax return since it was the interest on a home improvement loan. He said they would make the \$20,000 reduction on the loan balance after the first of the year.

Soon after the first of the year, I had all the tanks topped off. That included the diesel, backyard propane, gasoline and the kerosene tanks. Tractor supply was a source for gate openers for all the lane gates including both the old lane and the new lane. Harry and I also got salt blocks and mineral blocks for the pastures. And, since the hogs and cattle were still in the separate barn, we bought a pair of 70,000 BTU kerosene heaters.

“Buy much?”

“A few things, remote gate openers, salt and mineral blocks and kerosene heaters.”

“I’ve been sorting through the inventory in the shelter storage room and getting things arranged. I’m sorting by item category and by age. I’m making a list of things we’ll need to acquire; some in the near future and those that can wait. The food is all good and has at least fifteen years before we need to replace it. As soon as we get the ranch paid off, I’d like very much to add to our stores.”

“Anything in particular for the near future?”

“Yes. We can get all of that in Denver.”

“That drink your Dad fixed me was good. What was in it besides ginger ale?”

“Canadian Club. Why, do you want to buy some liquor?”

“A little. It would allow us to offer a drink to visitors like your mother and father.”

“Want me to make up a list of what he keeps on hand?”

“When you get time, no rush.”

“Let me warn you, Daddy has expensive tastes. I can make the list now. Canadian Club whisky, and since Canadian Club is rye whisky, we won’t need any American rye. Maker’s Mark Bourbon, Jack Daniels’ Gentleman Jack, that’s a Tennessee sipping whiskey. Johnny Walker black or Chivas Regal 18, Bombay Sapphire Gin, Jose Cuervo 1800 tequila and Grand Marnier for margaritas, any good brand of vodka. We can get all of those at Costco.

“All the rice they gave us is long grain or brown rice. I prefer Jasmine rice, also available from Costco. They only had pinto and navy beans and we can get some great northern and kidney beans at Sam’s Club. Costco sell Folgers coffee and large bundles of Charmin.”

“Are you getting that all down?”

“Yep. A good source for spices is Costco. They also carry bulk packages of muffin, cookie and pancake mixes. They also sell Aunt Jemima in twin packs. They have good prices on soft drinks and personal hygiene items like tooth brushes, paste, razors and shaving cream. Some stores carry canned chicken and canned beef and they all carry canned tuna. Sam’s has good pasta selections and sauces. We can supplement that with my homemade pasta sauce. I would like to add tomato paste and tomato sauce. I’ll hang onto this list and add to it as things come to mind.”

Mona continued to sort and inventory, slowly adding to the list. It took her about two weeks because of the children and the demands on her time. On several occasions, she'd take notes and have me move things for her. I helped all I could because with Harry Jr. working fulltime and Maria doing the gardening I had more free time.

"Is this going to be a good year in terms of income?"

"It looks good; we're sold out of four-year-olds. The crops look healthy and we should get good yields. We have cattle to sell in the fall and a large crop of hogs. We're providing your folks, ourselves and Mac with eggs and still selling an average of 1½ cases a week. I'm not going to jinx us, but to quote Maverick, 'it's looking good so far'."

"Are you going to try and pay the loan off or just make a double payment?"

"A double payment. We could probably pay it off, but that would leave us short of cash for wages and prepping. It will bring the balance down to \$32,400 and the final year's payment will be \$35,640 including interest."

"How many three year olds do we have?"

"Twenty eight."

"So the ranch will be free and clear at the end of next year?"

"Absolutely. As soon as the cashier's check clears, Julie will mail us the title. It's strange, we haven't heard from her in a while. Mom says she calls her. Do you suppose she's miffed about something? I made a spreadsheet back when showing the principal payments, interest and resulting balance. I totaled the payment showing she'd receive the financed principal and the projected interest at the stated rate, also showing the total.

"She hasn't received nearly as much interest as the spreadsheet showed because the double payments. The last time I talked to her about she agreed that the contract only specified minimum principal payments. She's earned a lot less interest than the spreadsheet shows."

"She's investing the money isn't she?"

"Yes; all but the taxes she has to pay on the interest. Maybe she made some bad investments although I doubt that. The prime rate has fallen quite a bit though and even good investments don't always return ten percent."

"We're going to have to take a short vacation. I'd like a nice dress that will let me show off my pearls and have a fancy meal in a Denver restaurant. It would just be an overnight trip and we can borrow Mom's car."

“Figure out where you want to go and we’ll drive down, buy you that dress and go out to eat. Maybe take in a stage show and spend the night in a nice hotel.”

“You’re too good to me.”

“Yeah, I know.”

I talked to Harry and put him in charge for the two days we’d be gone. Mona talked to my Mom and her Mom and June would be watching the kids. John asked me to do him a favor and stop by a gun store and pick up some ammo he had ordered. It was paid for and he’d save shipping. Since we’d probably get back late, just store it in our shelter storeroom. We left the following morning and Mona had several bottles of milk expressed. We took that and some baby food when we dropped off the kids.

The trip in took a little over two hours. We stopped at the hotel where she’d made reservations and checked in. Her pearls went into a hotel lockbox. She tried on several dresses before she found one she liked, a fancy cocktail dress.

We had time and we went to the gun store to pick up John’s ammo which turned out to be 10,000 rounds of full power Colt .45 and 4,000 rounds of .45-70-405 full power loads. I stacked as much of it in the back seat of the car that would fit and the rest in the trunk. At least the car was reasonably level and we wouldn’t be shining lights into the faces of oncoming traffic.

Nevertheless, we took a cab to the restaurant. Dinner consisted of a shrimp cocktail, Caesar salad, baked potato, lobster tails and Chateaubriand with chocolate mousse for desert. It was an excellent meal, if not very pricey. Saturday morning we slept in. After we cleaned up and dressed, we checked out of the hotel and put our suitcase in the car. I’m happy it was a fold over garment bag, space was at a premium. We returned to the hotel dining room for breakfast and pointed the car northeast.

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“You’re back early.”

“We had a good time Harry. We’ve never done something like that before. It’s about the fanciest meal I’ve ever eaten. You have a look on your face, is something wrong?”

“Well, not wrong exactly. I’ll tell you, I’m having trouble getting used to all the changes you made during the past year. Who ever heard of a multilevel concrete barn? I ran the milk cows in and up the ramp and used that fancy new milking machine. It’s a good thing those ramps between the floors are long; the cows weren’t too keen about climbing up them. And you have your own service station pump. I have to stop and think before I fill the fuel tanks, is this gas or diesel?”

“All we have is the combine and tractor and both are diesel. My pickup is diesel and that old Dodge is gasoline. I think we’re going to have to look into buying a car.”

“I meant to tell you, your pickup wouldn’t start. It cranks ok but wouldn’t fire. I think you’re going to need it towed.”

Mona and I got the old pickup around with the child seats and headed to John and June’s to pick up Paul and Dean.

“The ammo is in your car.”

“I thought I told you to store it in your store room.”

“You did. What do you want me to do?”

“Move it to the pickup and store it in your storage room. What do you think of the pickup?”

“I’m happy we have it. My pickup won’t start and we don’t own a car.”

“What’s wrong with your pickup?”

“I have no idea.”

“You should think about getting a Dodge Ram with that Cummins 6BT engine.”

“New or used?”

“Used should be ok. Maybe a trade-in with low mileage.”

“Even a low mileage trade-in would be expensive. I was thinking about buying a car. Maybe that will have to wait and we’ll replace the pickup.”

“Want me to have one of our guys pick it up and haul it to the dealer so they can check it out?”

“If it wouldn’t be too much trouble, thanks.”

They picked up the pickup the next morning and hauled it to the dealer. The dealer called late in the day and said he doubted the vehicle was worth fixing. Would I be interest in a new pickup? I told him I might be in the market for a used, low mileage Dodge Ram with the 6BT engine. My old pickup was a Ford F-150, a popular model.

“I had a customer who was a diehard Ford man for years. Bought himself a ’93 Dodge Ram and absolutely hated it. He traded it in for an F-250. I low balled the trade-in price and I’ll be darned if he didn’t take it. It’s mechanically sound, but he didn’t treat it well. I’ll

have to tell you, it's rough looking. If you'd be interested in it as is, I'd give you a good price."

"How much?"

"You'd better come in and look at it first and then we can dicker."

I didn't have any experience dickering or buying pickups. I called John and basically repeated what the dealer told me. He said to call the dealer back and tell him I was interested but wanted a mechanic to check it out. He'd send his mechanic over to check out the vehicle and if it was worth purchasing, he'd go with me to help me negotiate. I called the dealer back and explained. He said that was a good approach because I wouldn't have to take his word about vehicle.

When the mechanic said the vehicle was ok but a cosmetic disaster, John and I went to negotiate. The pickup needed a lot of body work. The box really should have been replaced. The front of the truck looked good. John suggested we get it as cheaply as possible and check junkyards for a replacement box. We might even find one the same color and his mechanic was a whiz.

It turned into a back and forth between the dealer and John with me on the sidelines. John made a good deal and all I had to do was write the check and sign papers. The dealer gave me a reasonable trade-in for my old pickup. I half wondered if he might have a rebuilt engine on hand to stick in my pickup and sell it. The pickup ran well enough and I drove home. John said they get on the network and find a box. He explained that auto salvagers had their own network and you put out a request. The local guy would search for you.

Mona thought I'd been gypped. Maybe. The odometer had 17 thousand plus miles on it. The truck ran very good and I had trouble figuring out what the previous owner hadn't liked. It took two days to find a box and it didn't arrive for a week. I drove the pickup to John's construction company and Mona picked me up. Three weeks later, the mechanic delivered the pickup.

It sure looked different. He went over the features. The new front bumper had a Warn 12k electric winch. There was a second fuel tank holding the same amount as the original. It was an original tank mounted in a different location and you could switch between tanks with a dashboard switch. The bed had a new lining and a Transfer Flow 98 gallon tank. Finally, there were 2", class IV tow hitch receivers front and rear. The tow ball was installed in the rear receiver. It even ran better because he'd cleaned the injectors.

"Still think I got gypped?"

"It does look much better. No car this year, huh?"

"I'm afraid not. As soon as that ranch is paid off, it will go to the top of the list."

Would You Rather... Four

Moving on.

It's Valentine's Day 1997, Paul's fourth birthday. Mona is pregnant with our third. Mona's birthday is in March and Dean's and mine in July. It's complicated when a birthday coincides with a holiday and both Paul and Dean's birthdays happened on holidays. I got Mona a dozen roses and a box of chocolates. Paul's birthday present was a yearling colt. He got other presents, a good tricycle and a football he wanted.

We now own the farm free and clear. Mac passed in January, heart attack. Harry Jr. completed the farrier school with very high marks. He's going to be a good one. We'll either buy a car late this year or early next year; probably early next year when the dealers are hurting for sales.

The Dodge is quite the pickup. It's not a Ford but I believe I may become a Dodge man. That old Crew Cab John gave us is like a Timex watch, it just keeps ticking. I'm half tempted to put a diesel engine in it and go all diesel. I priced the engines and changed my mind. When I mentioned it to John, he gave me a 'strange' look. I have no idea what it meant.

During the past year, several unusual things happened. They caught the Unabomber, finally. In early spring, the three month standoff ended in Montana. Midsummer, TWA flight 800 exploded shortly after takeoff, killing 230. The Olympic Summer Games took place in Atlanta and six days later, someone set off a bomb. Charles and Dianna got divorced. Clinton was reelected and JonBenét Ramsey was murdered in Boulder. She was only six.

This year, we had the North Hollywood shootout towards the end of February. Harry is finally becoming accustomed to the new dome. He still thinks a dome barn is 'unnatural'. We had a really good birthing season, well over 300 pigs, 32 foals and eight calves. The animals produce a good volume of manure and we continue to use it on the fields. The additional manure had helped increase our yields slightly. Going to heirloom seed may have been a good idea, but they don't seem to produce as much as hybrids. I'm thinking about saving the seeds and planting hybrids this year.

On March 23, Sara June Traherne joined the family. It was Mona's birthday and her present was the daughter we wanted. I had a present, but I'd wait until she came home from the hospital. She informed me she was going to stay an extra day for something to do with her belly button. I found out it was a postpartum tubal ligation. The night before, lights in formation were seen over Phoenix and speculation was that it was UFOs.

We had the crops in when a decision was reached about the Oklahoma City Bomber, Timothy McVeigh, in Denver. Guilty on 15 counts of murder and conspiracy. The jury sentenced him to death. Later this year, Diana was killed in a car crash in Paris. On the ranch, it was the same old, same old. Maria is doing the garden again this year and

June is helping out. As a result, the garden is full sized. It had been two years since the fuel was put in the tank and I added 20 gallons of the PRI-D to the diesel and 2 gallons of the PRI-G to the gas and a quart of PRI-D to the kerosene before I had the tanks topped off. We didn't use much kerosene, only 46 gallons. We still hadn't bought a car.

The generator was set up to exercise automatically and that didn't use much of the diesel. We did fill our vehicles from the diesel and the gas tanks and we had the money. Prices of everything were rising; fuel, food and everything we consumed. Commodities like grain, beef and pork were a seesaw of prices, up and down like a yoyo. Planting the hybrid corn, soy beans, oats, barley and wheat had increased our crop yields and we were forced to add more storage space. We put in round galvanized grain bins to the left of the dome, looking out of the back door of the house. The elevator raised their rates this year for processing and mixing our COB. Grain prices were up and beef and hog prices down, depending on the market.

Not only did we get our daughter for Mona's birthday, John gave Mona a Marlin 1895 Cowboy. He said the ammo in the storage room was for her rifle. On my birthday, I received the second of the pair of 1895 Cowboys he'd purchased for us. They'd be great if a buffalo drifted by the ranch. The other shoe fell at Christmas. We each received 1894 Cowboys in .45 Colt.

"What's next, Mona, SAA in .45 Colt in all three barrel lengths?"

"He told you?"

"Told me? No, I was being facetious. Are you trying to tell me something? I had to ask around to find out what you meant when you said you had a belly button procedure. Are you telling me that we're going to receive Colt revolvers?"

"Yes, the Cavalry models for our birthdays in Paladin holsters and the shorter barrel models in Laredoan Crossdraw rigs for Christmas."

"Mona, it will be the 21st Century in two more years. I'm not being ungrateful and I appreciate the sentiment, but really!"

"Did you ever stop and think that these gifts are part of our preps? Haven't you listened to my father discussing the merits of firearms in 'black powder' calibers?"

"That was when I was so angry with him over his upgrades to the shelter. Should we buy some lead?"

"Monty at the tire store has been saving used wheel weights for me since the two of you had that conversation. They're stored in that first floor storage space behind the walls in the dome."

"How much do you have?"

"I really don't know. Bob or Harry Jr. hauled them from the pickup to the storage and always complain about me causing them to get hernias. I think it must be a lot. But wheel weights are heavy."

"This, I've got to see."

I went into the tack/storage room in the dome and found 9 pails full of wheel weights. I tried to pick one up and almost gave myself a hernia because it wouldn't budge. How did the boys move those heavy pails?

"Did you find them?"

"Yes. We have nine pails full. I tried to pick one up and couldn't do it. How do the boys move pails that heavy?"

"They don't. I get the weights in fifty pound pails. They dump them together and give me back the empty pails. The next time I'm in town, I return the empty pails to Marty. Lead weighs, what, about 708 pounds per cubic foot and the pails are six gallons which is eight tenths of a cubic foot. That pail you tried to pick up weighs around 565 pounds, give or take."

"I'm happy I didn't try to kick it."

"Temper, temper. You would have broken your foot. She's done eating and from the smell of it, dirty. I'm going to give her a bath and put her down."

Nine pails of lead at 565 pounds per pail are 5,085 pounds of lead. One pound of lead is 7,000gr. We have enough wheel weights to make 36 million grains worth of bullets. The .45 Colt bullet is usually 250gr and the .45-70 Government bullets we have are 405gr. I think we'll stop after we have another pail filled. If anything ever happens, we can supply the state of Colorado with lead bullets. I'd better tell John that he doesn't need to buy any more lead.

I knew that John had been buying Pyrodex granular manufactured by Hodgdon. He had powder measures, one each for the volumetric of 20gr through 70gr in 5 grain increments. Knowing how he's been doing things, I wouldn't be surprised if he had a second casting setup and powder measures for us. The original black powder loads for .45 Colt called for 28 to 40 grains (1.8 to 2.6 g) of black powder behind a 230-to-255-grain (15 to 16.5 g) lead bullet. Original loads used a 40-grain (2.6 g) powder charge and 250-grain (16 g) bullet. This was reduced to 35-grains (2.3 g) of powder, and later, by the Army, to 28-grains (1.8 g).

The SAAs, came in three barrel lengths. The 7½" was the Cavalry model. The 5½" was the Artillery model and the 4¾" the Gunfighter/civilian model. With the adoption of the Colt Single Action Army revolver in 1873, the service cartridges were copper cased .45

center fire Benét inside primed “Colt’s Revolver Cartridges” loaded with 30 grains of black powder and an inside lubricated bullet of 250 grains.

Reasonably sure that we’d be getting the firearms and gun leather Mona described, I studied up on the subject of loading the modern smokeless powder firearms with black powder/Pyrodex. [A common style of inside-primed cartridge developed by Col. S V Benét commander of Frankford Arsenal in the late 1860s. It was used extensively in early US military ammunition. A copper or iron cup was secured inside the head of the case by characteristic crimps. This cup served as an anvil to enable the firing pin to activate the priming mixture and also to reinforce the head of the case.]

During 1998, January was an especially bad month for Bill Clinton. Mid-month, Paula Jones accused him of sexual harassment. Monica Lewinsky signed an affidavit in the Jones case denying that she and Bill a relationship, a friend who she told otherwise turned tapes of the phone conversations over to the Independent Counsel who was investigating Clinton. There’s more but let me keep it in sequence.

The Unabomber pled guilty and accepted a sentence of life without the possibility of parole. An earthquake killed more than 5,000 in Afghanistan. Dale won the Dayton 500 on his 20th try. In mid-February there was a tornado outbreak in Florida killing 42. A heavy earthquake hit Iran in mid-March, but who cares? There was the Jonesboro massacre with five killed. The shooters were 2 kids. During April, tornadoes hit Birmingham, Alabama and Nashville, Tennessee. During May, India and Pakistan took turns exploding nukes and Afghanistan had another earthquake killing another 5,000.

On the girls’ birthday, Sara got clothing and a doll. Mona got her Paladin rig, complete with sterling silver Paladin. I’ll have to admit, I drooled. I had to be careful and not let it show. Harry and I had been discussing this year’s crops and decided to plant the heirlooms for new seed. We had all of the crops in before they made Ben Hur the President of the NRA.

July brought a new disaster, a tsunami, striking New Guinea and killing 1,500. Of course we’re paying attention to disasters, we’re Preppers. Some nutcase kills two cops in the Capitol and Monica is granted immunity. Poor Bill. In August with our crops looking good, bombs are exploded in two of our embassies killing 224 and injuring 4,500. Following reports said the bombing are linked to a guy named bin Laden, a Saudi.

My revolver and holster are identical to Mona’s except for waist size and date of receipt. Paul was allowed to ride his yearling for a few seconds on Independence Day, his birthday. Bill Clinton finally came clean on August 19. I knew it all the time. The following day, we launched Tomahawk cruise missiles against al Qaeda in Afghanistan and against a chemical factory in the Sudan. It was a good strike, no one killed in Afghanistan, apparently, and we destroyed a pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum.

Richard Jewell, the guard suspected of the Atlanta bombing during the Olympics in ’96 is beginning to look innocent. Someone else is charged with that bombing and three

others. Jesse Ventura is elected as the Governor of Minnesota. I thought the Predator killed him (not really). And, finally Bill is impeached by the House.

We had a very good year. The crops yields were the highest they'd ever been for the heirloom seeds. We sold all of our four-year-olds and two three-year olds. We did well on beef and pork sales too. We ended the year with the best bank balance we'd had since we'd married. Just before Christmas John called and was excited. The spot price of gold was the lowest it had been all year. We invested about \$29 thousand and bought one hundred ounces in the one ounce bar form. By May of the following year, it was down to \$268 and we bought another 100 bars.

By September, it was around \$255 an ounce and we ignored him when he said 'Buy more, it will go up.' I started to watch the commodity markets for more than the price of grain and livestock. The gold price was a worse yoyo than grain or livestock. We held.

Sorry about that. Back to the previous Christmas, the gun rigs were more impressive than I had imagined. It was too cold to go shooting, unfortunately. We hadn't been practicing as we should have, limiting it to once per quarter. We simply hadn't had the time. Bob had graduated the previous year and he was on the payroll too. Maria agreed to continue helping with the garden and canning in exchange for a portion and the beef, pork and canned goods. We already gave them a side of beef and a hog plus milk and eggs. We agreed if she would return the empty jars.

It's hard to do much on a ranch during a Colorado winter. You mostly tend to the stock, milk, collect eggs, wash eggs and so forth. By now we produced enough milk that the dairy picked it up. We had to run a stainless steel line through the wall of the dome and build a housing around it to keep it clean. It wasn't much additional trouble to drill a hole for a hot water line so the driver could wash everything with hot water before he hooked up and flipped the switch to pump the milk.

Between when the shelter was built and early 1999, we had finished stocking the store-room. We didn't limit the stocking to food. We had all the disposables, like tissue, clothing in sizes from baby to full growth. Mostly jeans, shirts, socks, underwear and sneakers. We didn't stock boots due to the cost and the uncertainty about the choice of heel, etc. Mona and I had spare boots but only because we were full size. We added to the medical supplies too, including blood stoppers.

All through the years, she maintained her weight. If she had put on extra weight during a pregnancy, nursing, diet and exercise saw her back in form by the time she finished nursing. The good side of that coin was she had several sizes of clothing and the bad side was she had several sizes of clothing. I know; it doesn't make sense when I read what I wrote. I preferred the smaller sized clothing. I had the perfect program to stay in shape, we owned a ranch. I need say nothing more.

In late January 2000, an earthquake hit Columbia killing over 1,000. King Hussein of Jordan died of cancer and the glove didn't fit, Bill was acquitted. We were in a peace-

keeping role in Kosovo and on March 27, an F-117 Nighthawk was shot down. A second was later hit and damaged but returned to base. It never flew again.

We had our own Jonesboro in Littleton when two punks opened fire on their classmates and teachers. They killed 12 fellow students, 1 teacher and themselves. The DJIA closed above 11,000 for the first time on May 3rd and on the same day, a tornado outbreak occurred, lasting three days and spawning 140 tornadoes. An F5 hit Moore Oklahoma. Moore seemed to be a tornado target and this one killed 38 people. George Bush, Jr. announced he'll run for President and the Phillips explosion in Pasadena, Texas killed three. In July, a flash flood in Las Vegas killed two.

JFK Jr. was killed in a plane crash. His passengers included his wife and his sister-in-law. The Mercury capsule that Gus Grissom lost was recovered from the Atlantic Ocean. Supposedly the last flight of the SR-71 occurred. NASA has some at Edwards AFB in California and they're still flying. In total there are something like six of the planes in flight worthy condition. They not often flown because a single flight costs about \$350,000,

During the same month, October, an Egypt Air flight is flown into the Atlantic by the co-pilot killing 217. Let me explain my intention in recounting current events. Most are disasters of one kind or another, highlighting the propriety of our becoming Preppers. Others are simply interesting, unusual occurrences. Like when the Texas Aggie bonfire collapsed killing 12. People die every day and it's not always some tragic event. Joe DiMaggio died of lung cancer at age 84.

This year wasn't quite as good as the previous. We sold fewer horses, and began to give thoughts to expanding our services to include a riding stable. After a serious financial analysis and examining our potential market, we discarded the plan. We did begin boarding horses, preferably those we raised and sold. That would discriminate against people who had bought from other breeders and we opened it up to any horse regardless of source. We put Bob in charge of the stable operations which were slow to build.

The constant news was this Y2K computer bug. The problem, it seemed, was that databases had been set up with two digits for the year number. Therefore the field had to be expanded to three digits. The simple explanation was that the base year had been 1900 and the year 2000 would require three digits, if I understand it right. Those that used the YYYYMMDD format avoided the problem.

The Huntley was raised. Clive Cussler, an author, was deeply involved in the project. He was the author of several Dirk Pitt novels. On other naval matters, the USS Cole was bombed in Yemen, killing 17 crew members and injuring an additional 39. Hillary runs for and is elected as a Senator from New York. Bill opens an office in Harlem. The election results in the Presidential race between Bush Jr. and Gore are uncertain and pertain to votes cast in Florida. It goes all the way to SCOTUS where the court stops the recount giving the election to Bush. I don't recall mentioning the Chernobyl disaster

back in 1986. Everyone knows what happened, I'm sure. The plant was fully shut down on December 15th.

Despite the lower income this year, I was considering a new sniping rifle. The company in Phoenix that makes the fiberglass stocks for Springfield Armory, McMillan, is reported close to releasing a bolt action .50BMG caliber rifle that rumored to be the most accurate of all rifles of that type.

"I found your diary. I talked myself into reading it, sorry."

"It wasn't secret. I tried to go back and remember important events that would justify our new lifestyle. Natural and human caused disasters. There was no shortage of either. It's our insurance against just about any kind of disaster we could possibly face and some we won't.

"For example, we have very little risk of a hurricane in northeastern Colorado. I realize now that John's primary focus is WW III. And the preps we've made will cover that and close to every other kind of disaster we might face. If you're asking if I'm fully involved in the Preparation lifestyle it's an unequivocal yes. Despite all of the guns in our collection, I'm thinking about one addition, a .50 caliber sniper rifle."

"A Barrett?"

"No, your father has one of those. I heard on the grapevine that a company in Phoenix is about to release a new rifle in .50BMG, called the Tac-50. It's supposed to be released this year."

"How's it compare with Barrett?"

"I heard that the company guarantees it will shoot 0.5 MOA or less using Match ammo."

"Ok. The \$64 question. How much?"

"I don't know for sure. The rumor mill says the rifle is available as a standalone or in a package, which includes some freebies."

"Remember the dealer where we went for the shotguns, Beretta and AR-15?"

"Right, he seemed to specialize in military rifles. I'll find the invoice and call to see if they can get one and if they can't when it will be available."

"Any other firearms on your must have list?"

"Not at the moment, but you never know. That Y2K deal fizzled. I'm guessing that some people, who bought gold as a hedge, might be selling, dropping the price again. On another subject, we should melt down those wheel weights and cast the lead into ingots."

“Did you ever decide on biodiesel?”

“No, I haven’t. It seems that many more people are growing either soy beans or rape seed for raw materials. We might get a small processor and give it a try. It’s not something I want to tie up a lot of our capital in and not use it.”

I didn’t tell Mona that I really liked those Steyr AUGs John had. I liked them for several reasons, first and foremost the gas piston. Gas pistons were a proven technology. At one time, I almost bought a Ruger Mini-14 based solely on that fact. I tried a friend’s and found it to be compact, comfortable to carry and somewhat inaccurate. In the end, I couldn’t bring myself to buy one because of the accuracy issue. If Ruger ever overcame that problem, I might buy one.

Considering the number of folks who liked the AR-15, I wondered if I was being irrational. It shot well enough and it got a thorough cleaning every time we fired it. Mona especially liked it because the low recoil. While an unnecessary expense, I bought a loaded version M1A in ’97, the year after the model came out. It was primarily a backup rifle that Mona could use if she felt she needed more firepower than the M1 Carbine produced.

We weren’t ‘gun poor’ because most of what we had had been inherited from my late father. Those that weren’t inherited were occasional purchases or gifts. The number of gift firearms outnumbered the purchased firearms. If we bought a .50 caliber, we’d probably start out using surplus ball ammo. We’d go with Lake City if it was available. The other choices included the M33 Barrett sold and any Match grade ammo on the market.

Each of our children had firearms put up for them when they were old enough to shoot, all lever action rifles and single action revolvers in .22LR. Both boys had his own horse and from Paul’s 5th birthday forward, he was allowed to ride as long as he had an escort. Dean turned 3 in 2000. Because neither boy was deemed to be old enough, the rifle scabbards on their saddles remained empty and only Paul was learning to ride.

We had selected a third colt for Sara. Paul, Dean and Sara were each two years apart. If you’ll recall, they were born in ’93, ’95 and ’97. Our babies were growing. Paul would turn 8, Dean 6 and Sara 4. It will be only one more year before she learns to ride too. Paul had entered kindergarten in 98 and Dean this past year. Sara will start at the beginning of the 2002 school year.

Despite the Movie 2001, we weren’t on our way to Jupiter. However, on January 1st, a black monolith was placed in a Seattle park by an unknown artist. We agreed to buy Paul and Dean the same M1A model I bought for Mona and as a backup. We discussed doing the same for Sara. Mona suggested we wait awhile before deciding between a five-five-six and a seven-six-two. When I ordered the rifles for the boys, I ordered three

rather than two. Despite what I've said, I'll not buy another AR-15 until they're available with a piston. It's just a matter of time before someone starts building them.

This time the large earthquake occurred in El Salvador killing 800+ and another occurred in India killing 12,000+. One of our subs struck a Japanese trawler, sinking it and El Salvador has a second earthquake killing 400+. Houston was hit by a tropical storm killing 22 and causing \$5 billion worth of damage.

On Tuesday, September 11th, two hijacked jet airliners struck the World Trade Center Towers in New York, killing nearly 3,000. A third struck the Pentagon and a fourth crashed in Pennsylvania. A week later, anthrax attacks begin on selected individuals. It took the US less than a month to attack Afghanistan looking for bin Laden, the master-mind behind the attacks. In addition, Bush signed the USA PATRIOT Act.

Mona taped the coverage of 9/11. We were absolutely horrified. As the details came out about the crash in Shanksville, we were gratified to know that America still produced heroes. There were so many heroes on 9/11, airline passengers, New York City Fireman and Policeman.

Dale died in a last lap crash during his 21st Dayton 500 appearance. Over the course of this year, the number of deaths a famous people skyrocketed.

I bought Mona her first string of black pearls, a uniform princess strand, and matching black pearl studs. She reciprocated on my birthday with a Tac-50. Black pearls are expensive but didn't cost nearly as much as the rifle. It was the complete set they sell for around nine grand. She paid extra for the Night Force scope and applied for the tax stamp for a Jet titanium suppressor. She included five ten-round boxes of 750gr Hornady A-MAX Match.

It was October and we spent one Saturday firing all of the 'cowboy guns', the Tac-50 and refreshing our skills with our primary carry firearms. It was a family day that included us and John and June. John was suitably impressed with the new .50 caliber rifle.

"You've done well out here on the ranch, you two. I had some doubts in the beginning and am thankful there was no reason for those doubts. You're soul mates if there ever was such a thing. We have three wonderful grandchildren, each special in his or her way. We've nearly completed writing off the personal loan and when that's done, we're going to start in on those things we put in the company name. I'll 'buy' them from the company as gifts for your family.

"We'll probably do the generator first and then the tanks. It's going to take some time to buy the fuel, so be patient. Mona says you're keeping the tanks topped off. That was my intention. Sometimes I simply forget the fine print. Alan, since you've provided the kids with battle rifles, June and I are going to continue in our own way with the old time firearms; one complete set for each grandchild. What happened last month proved to us

that a person has to prepare for the future. We're very grateful you joined the community of Preppers."

"John, you know I meant what I said that day. You have a lifetime supply of anything we produce out here on the ranch. When your geldings get beyond their prime, we'll replace them and shift your old ones to the riding stable."

"I thought you abandoned those plans."

"We did and went to boarding horses. That hasn't proven to amount to much and we do get an occasional request to rent a horse for a ride. Mona and I haven't discussed it, yet. From the look in her eye, that will happen tonight, before any final decision is reached."

"She does have 'that look' as you posed it."

"She made arrangements to collect used wheel weights. That's why I called and asked you to hold off on buying more lead. If we could, I'd like to borrow your casting equipment and turn those weights into ingots."

"I'll just give you the equipment we bought for the two of you. Would that be ok?"

"I've come to know you pretty well. I suspected you had purchased casting equipment. You can't help yourself, can you?"

"Not really. You married the apple of my eye, Daddy's little girl, and gave us our only grandchildren."

"Did you spoil her bringing her up?"

"I don't think we did. Does she seem spoiled to you?"

"Only once and that was years back."

"The Prom?"

"Yes. You know what happened?"

"She told June and June told me. I was really tempted to teach Jeff some manners. He's lucky June restrained me. In a way, it's funny how things turn out. Not long after, Jeff's father lost his job and came to me looking for work. I suppose I must have thought, 'like father, like son'. I didn't hire him. I've wondered a time or two whether I did the right thing. No matter, Jeff was what his parents raised him to be and I have no regrets."

“We planned an indoor picnic. There’re slow cooking baby back ribs in the oven. You will stay for the picnic, won’t you?”

“I don’t know. June?”

“Mona said they have a small liquor cabinet stocked with your favorites, if that’s holding you back. I’d like to try those ribs.”

“Sure, we’ll stay, because of the ribs, not the liquor. When did you start buying liquor?”

“After you gave me my first mixed drink. We didn’t limit it Canadian Club, either. I just recently bought six bottles of Jack Daniels Single Barrel. We actually have Jack Black, Gentleman Jack and Single Barrel. Our liquor supply will last us for years.”

“I’d like to try that Single Barrel. You finished filling the storeroom, I understand?”

“Yes sir, food, clothing, disposables and medical supplies including some of those new blood stoppers.”

“It’s good that you did it now that we’re at war in Afghanistan. I wonder if Junior is going to clean up after his father.”

“Are you referring to Iraq?”

“I most certainly am. You know we have those no fly zones in the north and south. The northern is areas of Iraq north of the 36th parallel and the southern is the areas south of the 33rd parallel. Saddam has a standing reward offer of \$14,000 for anyone who shoots down a British or American plane. Mark my words, our government is up to something and I believe it will lead to an invasion of Iraq.”

We returned to the house and cleaned up. After getting drinks for June and Mona, John and I opened the first bottle of Single Barrel. The flavor was unique and very smooth. I read up on the product at their website and no two barrels were exactly the same. I intended to see if the liquor store had, or could get, another 6 bottle case from the same lot.

After dinner, the children were bathed and sent to bed. Mona had opened a bottle of the Grand Marnier and poured us each a small after dinner drink.

“Where did you get those Steyr AUGs?”

“The same place I got the G3s. Beyond that, I’d rather not say. I will tell you that they aren’t on any registry, at least in this country. Are you looking to get an AUG?”

“I’d like to have a five-five-six with a gas piston that isn’t a Mini-14.”

“H&K makes that G-36.”

“In the US?”

“No, I believe they’re made in Germany.”

“That means that the only select fire versions that can be imported are for the military and law enforcement.”

“Why would you want select fire versions?”

“From my reading, I understand that 95% of the time, you don’t need full auto. The other 5% of the time, it’s used when you’re ambushed, ambushing or as suppressive fire.”

“Figured that out, did you?”

“Yes sir. If something were to ever happen, it might be one of those cases of ‘would you rather have it and not need it, or need it and not have it?’”

“You read the Prep forums?”

“What forums?”

“Websites dedicated to preparedness and related subjects.”

“I haven’t heard about them.”

“Do a search using the term preparedness websites. There are some that come up with lists of sites. That expression you used frequently appears on those websites.”

“I heard the expression a few years back. I don’t remember where or from whom.”

“Registered full auto weapons are a hassle. On the other hand, get caught with an un-register NFA firearm can get you ten years.”

“NFA?”

“The National Firearms Act of 1934; the law that was passed to control automatic weapons, sawed off shotguns and silencers, among other things.”

“The tax stamp that Mona had to get to buy the suppressor?”

“That’s right. In 1934, \$200 was a large sum of money as opposed to the present time. You could always get a Mini-14 and have a gunsmith accurize it.”

"I'll wait until someone develops something like gas piston for the AR-15. I may get my rifle converted and if it's what I want, we'll buy more of the same."

"You could always buy a Ruger AC-556."

"What's that?"

"It's the select fire Mini-14. They have as many bad points as good points. For example, they're semi-auto, 3 round burst and full-auto. They use a piston. They come in the 18" and 13" barrels. The safety is the same as the one on the Mini-14. They overheat, badly, if fired for extended periods. Ruger only sells them to law enforcement and military. And, last but not least, they're expensive."

"What do you recommend?"

"I think you're probably right, someone will offer a piston rifle or conversion kit one of these days. Your AR has the 20" barrel, flashhider and bayonet lug. Wait for the conversion. Other than that, you'd have to get on the black market and buy a G-36. That's where I got my rifles. You never know who might have what you need."

"The guy who sold me mine got caught and is doing time. I only knew his name by accident and he didn't know mine. It's probably not a good time to be shopping around to find the black market, either. Wait and see if the Assault Weapons Ban sunsets in 2004. If it does, you'll probably see all kinds of semi-autos that fit the bill."

"I'll probably do that John. I'm tempted to ask you to sell me two of your G-3s and two of your AUGs. I won't ask because if the time ever comes we need one, we'll know where to go."

"Very good thinking."

I was thinking something different, "It will be a long time before we'll ever need these preparations. When we do, there'll probably half a dozen or more short stroke piston rifles on the market and we'll have our own. If not, Mona will have probably have inherited her father's. Just be patient, Alan, it's a win-win situation."

"There for a minute I thought you were trying to talk Daddy into selling you four rifles."

"Nope, we'll buy our own when they're available."

"So you meant what you said?"

"Oh, I had a couple of other thoughts, but they're not important for now."

There was an ongoing dialogue about whether the US and/or Britain would take on Iraq. The US activities were notched up a bit in the southern no fly zone and some wondered

if the US and Britain coalition was softening up Iraq as a prelude to war. Much of the following year, 2002, saw more and more rhetoric. Based on faulty intelligence, Colin Powell made a presentation to the United Nations on February 5, 2003 to argue in favor of military actions. He asserted that “there can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein has biological weapons and the capability to rapidly produce more, many more.”

On March 20, only six weeks later, Operation Iraqi Freedom began. The Iraqi Survey Group failed to find any weapons of mass destruction. Some weapons were found, however they proved to be abandoned chemical weapons predating 1991. The coalition forces completed the occupation of the country by May.

Junior flew to the Abraham Lincoln and announced the end of combat operations. His statement was overconfident and it was more like the beginning than the end. Clearly visible in the background was a banner stating “Mission Accomplished” prepared by the White House staff and supplied at the request of the Navy. I doubt there is anyone alive who was unaware of what a major blunder that was.

It was only correct that Baghdad had been captured along with some major cities. Phase two of the operation was the occupation. The British occupied Basra and the remaining coalition members the remainder of Iraq. Compared to the First Gulf War, this coalition could be properly termed ‘the coalition of the few’.

Several nations declined to participate and Turkey declined use of their territory to allow movement of troops from the north. As the occupation continued, guerilla forces mounted a series of ongoing attacks and developed a new weapon to use against coalition forces, the Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Military Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams were working overtime and the body count continued to rise.

In the late 20th and early 21st Centuries, the folks back home no longer accepted massive body counts like we had in Vietnam. Additionally, pressure was quickly brought by the population and the Congress against the war. Unlike Vietnam, there were no mass shootings of college students or draft card burning. This time around, the protests were more controlled and we learned of Cindy Sheehan and the Westboro Baptist Church. Mrs. Sheehan son’s Casey was killed in 2004 by the Mahdi Army established by a cleric name al-Sadr.

There’s no reason to relate more because as of January 2011, we haven’t completed the drawdown. Operation Enduring Freedom, the operation in Afghanistan and other locations is also ongoing and they simply can’t find bin Laden. Saddam was located in late 2003 and found hiding in an underground shelter (Operation Red Dawn). He was tried and convicted of War Crimes and executed on December 30, 2006, three years after his capture.

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Back to the present, 2002. There's an expression used to describe combat and other activities; hours of boredom followed/interspersed with moments of sheer terror. It's a good description of ranching if you omit the moments of sheer terror. Ranching is hard work even if you have a small staff of hardworking hired hands. We basically had 3½ hired hands; three fulltime and one parttime (Maria).

Harry Jr. had been dating a lovely young lady from Sterling and when he proposed, she accepted. He was a good hand and when he approached us about adding a second singlewide next to his folks, we checked the available space and agreed.

I made him rent the trencher for the plumbing and electrical trenches. When he had that finished, I gave him the number of the plumber we used. One of his high school classmates was an apprentice plumber and he hired him instead. Since Bob would probably find himself in the same position in 2-3 years, we paid for the materials to run the septic, water and propane lines for two mobile homes.

It still cost him an hour's labor for the journeyman plumber training his friend to check everything out and sign off on the installations. We had good yields from both the garden and field crops. We sold two batches of hogs, just shy to 500 in total, keeping back seven. We also sold 19 cattle, keeping back three. The cattle and hogs went to the butcher plant and the meat was divided with John and June, and each of us getting a side, and Harry and Maria, Harry Jr. and Bob each getting a side and a hog.

Harry and Maria dug into their savings and helped each of the boys buy a good, used singlewide. The boys still ate most of their meals with their parents but supplied meat and eggs from their shares. Harry Jr. and Crystal were married in late June and she helped Maria with the garden for a share of the produce. When Mona began planning to make her mother's pasta sauce, she added Roma tomatoes to the garden crops.

We had expanded our chicken flock and were selling a case a week of eggs after dividing them up. We gave Harry and Maria and each of the boys a dozen per week. John and June got a tray (18) as did we.

We butchered broilers early and the layers towards the end of the year as baking hens.

Our fall grain harvest was the best we'd had to date. We had expanded the garden by 25% and the canned goods were also shared. Paul turned 9 and we gave him his 9422. We'd give him the Single Six for Christmas and the shotgun on his following birthday. We'd selected Remington Express combos and had them put up. I gave Mona the Matinee strand of black pearls for her birthday. Paul was becoming a skilled rider and Dean was on the way as was Sara who was allowed to ride escorted.

Towards the end of the year, we converted our two hundred ounces of gold bars to gold coins. We got American Eagles, 50 ounces of each denomination. We added \$1000 face of mixed silver junk coins and 200 Silver Eagles. Back when we hired Harry Jr., we decided to use a local bookkeeping service to handle the payroll, payroll taxes and

ranch accounting records. She also prepared the estimated taxes and deposited the payments at the bank.

I haven't mentioned Mom much because after Mac died she moved to the same area where Julie and Bob lived. Monsanto had disposed of that facility and Bob was working at another plant. I think it's in Alabama or Louisiana. Wherever it is, Mom bought the house and they live with her or vice versa. Mac's home brought a good price and he had a large insurance policy on the order of \$100,000 and a separate \$10,000 policy to cover burial costs.

Mom called regularly to check up on the kids and check on ranch operations. She seemed to time her calls to when I was working in the barns or fields. I was too busy to worry about it and Mona was filling me in on each call.

"You've got a gray hair."

"No way, I'm only 33."

"I don't care how old you are, you have a gray hair."

"Pluck it out please."

"It will just come back."

"If it does you can pluck it again."

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Speaking of insurance, I had the life insurance I bought when I bought the ranch. It was a \$200,000 paid at sixty-five policy from Northwestern Mutual. We got Mona the same. John had purchased a single payment whole life policy on each of the kids after they were born and insurable, just in case (final expenses). We were keeping the payments up on our two policies and from one viewpoint; one could consider them to be just a part of our Preps.

Remember how I got into preps because of a grain mill? We looked at the Country Living Mills including the motorized version. We bought a Diamant 525 from Lehman's with spare parts and the motor/pulley set. We got the flaker from Canning Pantry and picked up the order ourselves at their 'Will Call'.

We did a little sightseeing along the way, checking out Monument Valley and Zion. June came to the house to keep an eye on the kids. We rented an enclosed U-Haul trailer in Salt Lake City on the way up with drop off to be in Denver.

The trailer was filled to the brim with regular and wide mouth quarts, regular mouth pints and regular mouth jelly jars. We also bought various spices and premixes plus two cas-

es of each size lid. We did buy one other thing, a large hot air popcorn popper. Mona had heard of a company named Tattler that made 'reusable lids' and was going to check it out.

It seemed like our expenses were rising faster than our income. We began looking at our income versus our expenses. The income had been rising, which we already knew. The costs of raising livestock consisted of two elements, quantity of purchases and costs of the purchases.

The quantities were in line with the increase in head of livestock. The costs, however, were rising disproportionately. It wasn't any one thing either. The elevator was charging more for processing and supplements. The vet had increased his fees. We tried to time our fuel purchases when prices were down and discovered that down was relative.

"There's no doubt about it, Alan, we need to raise our prices."

"Mona, I don't know how much the market can bear. People don't use horses these days like they did in old times."

"One hundred a head would cover the additional expenses. The beef and pork are controlled by market forces as are the eggs. Since our fuel tanks are huge, we don't have to fill them as a matter of course. We'll do much better if we let the prices fall. You watch the commodities, you better start watch the price of crude oil too.

"I'll watch the news and try to find those stories pertaining to 'larger reserves than expected' and 'unexpected increases in imports'. Either of those will indicate a glut and falling prices. We can also time our purchases to coincide with the construction companies' and Daddy's personal purchases."

"Our savings are increasing but not producing as much income. I don't understand the stock market and I'm not interesting in learning. A person would think that after all these years of ranching, it would be getting easier rather than harder."

On February 1st, returning from a mission of 16 days in orbit, space shuttle Columbia burned up during reentry. They eventually figured out that a hunk of foam insulation from the fuel tank struck the left wing of the shuttle creating a hole in the leading edge.

As mentioned when I got ahead of myself, we invaded Iraq and accomplished the mission in early 2003. Except, well, I've covered that. In late May, another earthquake occurred. This one was in Algeria and killed around 2,200. They caught the guy accused of the Olympic bombing.

We had the crops in and they were emerging and this could be a good year. We had a well drilled at a point in the 320 that we used for crops to cover us if we didn't get enough rain. The driller suggested an electric pump with a solar setup and we took the

risk. The only other option was digging a very long trench and burying the power cables, which was cost prohibitive.

They charged that famous cook and her broker with obstructing justice and something else. A former CIA agent had her identity revealed by Robert Novak. He's probably proud of himself. It's a hot summer, causing power outages here and there, including a big one in the northeast and Canada. And, the price of fuel rose sharply.

There were too many terrorist attacks around the world to count and I stopped trying. It may be a sign of the times and a high percentage involved Muslims. Around Christmas Mad Cow Disease was reported in Washington State.

Each of our children received some kind of firearm on their birthdays. Mona and I began the long process of continuing education on firearms safety and teaching them to shoot. I gave Mona the choker strand of black pearls to match her other stands. All things being equal, she'll have a full set in two more years. She gave me a gift of equal value, a half case of Hornady A-MAX Match 750gr for my rifle.

As seems the case these days, a whole lot of famous people died, including Mr. Rogers.

During 2004, it was same ol' same ol'. We have money set back at the end of the year, earmarked for those rifles I want. Of note, to us, was the sunset of the Assault Weapons Ban. We can once again buy high capacity magazines. Weather wise, it was a bad hurricane season.

We nudged up our horse prices \$100 and sold just as many as we had in 2003. Things were looking good near the end of the year when there was an earthquake just off the coast of Sumatra generating a huge tsunami. It rolled across the Indian Ocean striking country after country. The early death toll is put at 187,000 with 40,000 reported missing. Sometime in 2005, they had a better count and said the death toll was 230,000+.

Each of our children has their firearms including the 9422, Single Six and Express Combos. The M1As are still put up and we're thinking maybe when they're 13 or 14. It would be a good time to start them with iron sites and consider a scope once they're quite proficient. None of them are quite ready to shoot the shotguns, either.

"Mom and Dad have the Colts bought and put up for the kids. She says they'll buy all the Marlins during 2005."

"He's still on that kick?"

"Fraid so. It must have been their year for buying handguns. Mom said that they also bought two M1911 style .45s and a Browning Hi-Power classic."

"Do you know which brand of .45?"

“No. I doubt they’re Kimber or Colt. Probably Springfield Armory. I can ask if you want.”

“No, just let us be as surprised as the kids.”

If they were buying handguns from Springfield Armory, they should have looked into the XD series. I’m on Frugal’s Forums these days. I mostly just lurk and read the stories. It’s amazing what some of these authors come up with. I thought the Three Amigos was the name of a movie. Apparently their real names are Gary, Ron and Clarence.

To top it off, Mona had misunderstood June. They hadn’t purchased the M1911s yet, they had them on order. They were on order because they wouldn’t be released to the public until late 2005. And neither of us had found a short gas piston AR-15.

We did learn what brand of pistol they bought, Taurus. They were the new PT1911B that is supposed to have a bunch of extra features and were comparing them to 1911s like the Kimber. They did actually have a lot of extras and had been hand fitted at the factory in Brazil.

Junior beat John Kerry. There were accusations flying every which way about Kerry’s service in Vietnam. There were some the other way about Junior’s Air National Guard service. Junior was sworn in for his second term. There was a big earthquake in Iran with 500+ killed and 1,000+ injured, but who cares?

On Mona and Sara’s birthday, a refinery in Texas City exploded killing 15 and injuring 170+. The follow month the Pope died and they elected an Austrian to replace him. Our corn was knee high by the 30th of June. NASA is getting pretty good. On Paul’s birthday, they hit a comet creating a crater for study. Since all three of the kids had their firearms, there were no gun gifts this year. Paul will be 13 next year and we might begin the parade with the M1As.

A few days later, there are a series of terrorist explosions in London. Not long after, a few weeks anyway, a hurricane hit New Orleans. The death toll was 1,836+ and Louisiana and Mississippi are hurt badly. Junior sent Brownie and Brownie didn’t have a clue. They finally have to bring in a General, Russel L. Honoré, a Creole from Louisiana, to sort the mess out. They called him, ‘The Ragin’ Cajun’ and he kicked butt and took names.

Honoré made headlines nationwide when he told a reporter not to get "stuck on stupid" in reference to a question about the government response to the hurricane. That Mayor they have should have been shot for failing to prepare the local population of New Orleans. The police department started a gun grab but the NRA finally did something worth discussing and put a stop to that.

But wait, there’s more. Hurricane Rita was headed for Texas and the Texans knew after Katrina to evacuate. Except, people didn’t evacuate when told to and others left before

they should have resulting in a massive gridlock. In the end, it worked out with only 120 (too many) deaths. Compare that to Katrina. Earthquakes just don't stop happening. This one was in the Kashmir and killed ~80,000.

Do you really believe that patience is its own reward? You should, H&K released a series of rifles based on the M-16 design with one important difference. THEY'RE SHORT STROKE GAS PISTON OPERATED. We made a mad dash to Denver and had a class III dealer order one for Mona. Since she had already been checked out by the ATF, she got the stamp before the rifle was delivered.

"I'm not sure I like that boxy forearm but they do offer a 20" barrel."

We asked John and June what they thought.

"I think you have a winner here. The rifle uses the same piston system as the G-36 Alan, with all those rails, you could hang everything on that rifle but the kitchen sink. Can you replace the flashhider with a suppressor?"

"I think it's possible, I chose the Vortex Flash eliminator. Unless I'm mistaken, Smith Enterprise makes the Vortex and has a M4DC sound suppressor."

"Surefire M4FA would be better. You finally got your full-auto. Was it worth the wait?"

"Absolutely. We've been setting aside money every year for some time. We may just buy four more plus five suppressors. Do you think we could do it in one fell swoop or should we space them out?"

"I'm not sure it really makes any difference. It's a shame you couldn't get something un-registered though."

"Five times ten is fifty and that's a long time to spend in prison. I don't see that we have any choice. All of these things are listed as military or LEO only but the dealer didn't have trouble selling them to Mona."

"Why Mona?"

"She bought the Jet suppressor. Do you think I should consider a suppressor for the Super Match?"

"It's your rifle so if you get one, the suppressor should be in your name. Get a Surefire, they last longer than the rifle barrel."

"Oh yeah. These rifles are ten times better. Do you think we should buy match ammo?"

"I wouldn't. Save your Match ammo money for the M1A and Tac-50."

“Ok, I will. Keep your eye peeled for M855 and M866, if you will.”

“Can do. Did you ever settle on a round for the Super Match?”

“I finally did; Black Hills 175 BTHP match. It’s good ammo.”

“Expensive.”

“You got that right. Speaking of ammunition, I decided to get some different shells for the 12 gauge shot guns. Brenneke has that 2¾” Tactical Home Defense round. Oh, and I finally got two cases of Remington 3” #4 buck.”

“But, you have hunting ammo too, don’t you?”

“Twenty-five hundred rounds each of No 2, 4 and 6 shot. Ammoman had some Lake City 7.62 NATO FMJ and we bought twenty thousand rounds.”

“If you buy much more ammo and you’re going to have to build a bunker.”

“Not if I can help it. It’s stored in the shelter storeroom with all the rest. The kids can’t get to it yet and I put a lockset on the storeroom door.”

“Do you have answer for every question?”

“Do you mean other than what we planned for? Not on your life. We have started using up the old LTS foods and ordering replacements. The kids like several of the things in those stores, especially the hot chocolate and strawberries. I tried an MRE once and didn’t care for it. We bought Mountain House in 1, 2 and 4 serving pouches.”

“So what are you missing?”

“Camping equipment in case we had to Bugout.”

“Do you have any idea what you want?”

“One or two Coleman propane stoves with ovens and a larger supply of forty pound propane bottles. The poles that mount on the tanks and the hoses to connect the stoves. Perhaps some catalytic tent heaters. We’ll also need the lamps that mount on the top of the poles. I figure two tents, Mountain Hardware Trango 3.1s. Self-inflating sleep pads and those Slumber Jack sleep systems. We have a full case of strike anywhere matches if you need some.”

“Katadyn water filters?”

“Small ones with spare parts so each pack has one. A Sawyer zero two for the family as a whole. Two quart Oasis canteens and that ALICE gear that includes the stainless canteen, cup and stove. We have more ALICE gear on our shopping list.”

“Full blown Prepper, aren't you?”

“I've been keeping track of natural disasters and some manmade. It seems like there's a new one every day.”

“Yep. That's just life. Think you'll be finished when you acquired the rifles you mentioned?”

“I'd like to think so. I'm sure something will come up and we'll have to add, 'just one more thing'.”

◦

“I like that rifle, did you?”

“I surely did. This is what you've been looking for all these years isn't it?”

“You got me there. John and I discussed it briefly and you and I are going back to that dealer and order four more rifles, five suppressors and suppressors for the M1As. There's something very wrong with our country.”

Mona was as impressed with the HK-416 as John and I were. We drove down to Denver and placed an order for four more of the rifles, five of the M4FA suppressors and 5 7.62 Surefire suppressors for the M1As. The fees for the tax stamps ran almost a three grand and we had to return to Sterling to get the Sheriff to sign off on the purchases and take our fingerprints.

“I've been meaning to ask. What are those shrubs you're planting along the fence line?”

“Blackberries; the kind with thorns. They are an added layer of protection. It's something I should have done years ago. There are some roses planted too as a source of rose hips.”

“The blackberries I understand. I dearly love blackberry jam. What do you do with the rose hips and what exactly are rose hips?”

“They're the fruit of the rose plant and a source of vitamin C. I can make jam or jelly from the fruit.”

It didn't take Mona that long to get the ATF approvals. On the other hand, it took me seven months. I had a gunsmith mount the fast attach muzzle brake on the barrels. There was a difference between the Surefire suppressor and the ones from Smith En-

terprise. His could be rebuilt and the Surefire couldn't. But, the Surefire claim was that theirs would last for 30,000 rounds.

Using standard ammo, none of the suppressors really totally silenced the weapons. What they did do was quiet the weapons and diffuse the sound. After firing all of the rifles to ensure function, we cleaned them and added them to the gun safe in the shelter store room.

"If we buy any more firearms, we're going to need a second safe Alan."

"I think you're right. What we have represents all of the American individual military firearms of the 20th century and some from the 19th. Don't have a Browning Automatic Rifle or a Thompson submachine gun."

"Or, a grease gun."

"The M3?"

"Is that the model number?"

"It's the military designation. They brought out the M3 during WW II to replace the Thompson and later upgraded it to M3A1. I've seen pictures, but have never actually seen one."

"You don't want the missing firearms?"

"My Great Grandfathers and Grandfathers never carried them or I'm sure they would be in the collection. There are some things obviously excluded like hand grenades, bazookas and flame throwers."

"I'm glad. Having hand grenades in a house with three children isn't compatible. Mom and Dad have some smoke grenades Dad bought from some place in Texas. She said they were military smoke grenades. Are we going to add red dot sights to the HK-416s?"

"We could. Do you have any particular model in mind?"

"Not really. There are several to choose from, Aimpoint, EOTech and Trijicon. And there are others that are less expensive that might be just as good."

"I'm not all that familiar with the sights. I'll just have to ask around. We might think about putting the same type of sight on the M1As. I think I'll talk to John. He seems to stay on top of subjects like this. Are they expensive?"

"They can be. It would depend on what we bought. A top of the line sight might run \$700 or more. Some of the less expensive models are much less. Depending on what a per-

son buys, there is an issue of the battery life. If I remember what Mom said, the Trijicon doesn't use a battery. She also said that some that use batteries can use up the battery in only a few hours. I'm sure Daddy knows more so you should talk to him like you mentioned."

"We definitely need to order some five-five-six ammo in large quantities. I'd better get on the web and see who has the best price listed. Then I can call and negotiate based on a truck shipment rather than UPS. Aim Surplus is always lower than Ammoman, but his price includes the shipping. I've noticed that his out the door price is much lower so he might be willing to work a deal if he has what we want."

"What do we want?"

"I'm leaning towards the M855 and a case or two of the M856 tracers."

"Don't you dare buy tracers! I'll admit they maybe are helpful for a machinegun but we aren't shooting machineguns. A tracer would just tell the person we were shooting at where we were shooting from."

"Good point. Ok, no tracers. God help us if we ever find ourselves shooting at people."

"God doesn't have anything to do with that. He gave human beings free choice. You saw what happened in New Orleans. I like that General, he's plain spoken and very honest."

"I agree. I think the nickname 'Ragin Cajun' really fits."

For her birthday in 2006, Mona got the final strand of black pearls, the opera length strand, having received the collar strand the previous year. We started Paul in on the M1A on the day after his 13th birthday. Sara was, for her age, becoming very accomplished on her gelding. Dean was turning out to be the quiet one of the three. He didn't have a lot to say; but when he did talk, you'd better listen. You could tell if it was important because he'd look you right in the eye. He tended to not repeat himself, either. At eleven, he was nearly as mature as Paul was at thirteen. Paul was a good rider and Dean was head and shoulders better.

Aim Surplus cut us the best deal and they were closer than Ammoman, reducing the freight charge. I checked out Ammunition to Go and they were out of the Mil-Spec smoke grenades.

The year 2006 was calm when compared to other years. There was a mudslide in the Philippines that killed 1,126. We lost one planet; Pluto was downsized to a dwarf. North Korea detonated a nuke. Given the size of the detonation, speculation was that it was a fizzle. I had very few additions to my list of significant events.

Our crop output was average and we didn't sell any grain. Our livestock program did well in terms of birthing. The sales of pork and beef were good but not spectacular and the horse sales fell off. A person can tell that we're getting older because the number of famous people dying continues to rise. When people have money to spend, they buy things like horses. When money gets tight, they buy food and fuel first and luxury purchases fall. I'm beginning to wonder about the state of the economy.

We are somewhat less affected because we grow our own meat, produce our own milk and eggs and have a large garden. Speaking of which, Mona found those permanent lids, Tattler, and bought enough for double our needs for one year. She also bought the replacement rings they sell in case a ring got damaged opening a jar. According to the polls, Junior is losing supporters left and right.

The following year, 2007, was spectacular for the absence of notable natural disasters. Only two were added to my list. The first was an 8.0 earthquake in Peru that killed 512 and injured 1,500+. The second was the Cyclone that hit Bangladesh killing ~10,000. The major human caused disaster that I noted was the killing of Benazir Bhutto and several others in a bomb attack in Pakistan. I think we're entering a recession.

Activities on the ranch were equally unspectacular; average crops for a second year, increased birthing and a large sale of pork and beef. Those were coupled with fewer sales of horses and we shut down the boarding venture. Harry Jr. is now a fully certified farrier and our long time farrier hung up his hammer, retiring in September.

We had completed filling the large holes in our preparations getting the Trijicon M4 sights for all five M1As and the five HK-416s. The other hole, the camping gear, had been purchased over a two year period beginning in 2006. Instead of taking the Super Blackhawk and the 1894, I began to wear the Paladin rig with the Cavalry model revolver and the 1894 Cowboy rifle.

After some research, I discovered that the Massassauga rattlesnake were endemic to SE Colorado, not NE Colorado, explaining why I'd never actually seen one. The rising food prices became apparent when we began adding replacement LTS foods to the storeroom. We continued to add the pails of grain from our crops each year and were running out of room.

John asked me when the last time I had the radiation equipment calibrated and I was forced to admit, it hadn't been recalibrated since he'd put it in the cabinet. Mona and I packed it all up and sent it off to Texas except for the AMP 200 that went back to Arrow Tech.

The year 2008 came in with a literal bang. The first terrorist bombing of the year was on January 1st. My earlier thoughts that we entering a recession were confirmed and we're in a recession triggered in large part by the previous year's subprime mortgage crisis. We were overjoyed that we weren't carrying any debt. We decided to take a break in our horse breeding program because they aren't selling at all well and our herd is ap-

proaching the limit we want to support. The decision came only after the mares were bred so the decision will affect future years and not the present.

“We should have loaded up on gold and silver when we had the chance.”

“What’s it up to? I stopped following the price.”

“It’s over \$800 an ounce for gold and silver is around \$17 an ounce.”

“We can’t buy more at those prices.”

“It can still go up Alan.”

“What goes up can come down. Any idea what current land prices are?”

“I didn’t check, but you can be sure the ranch is worth a lot more than we have invested. My father is selling out and retiring.”

“I didn’t realize he was at retirement age.”

“Close enough, according to him. He firmly believes that construction is falling off. His business manager believes otherwise and made what Daddy said was an offer he couldn’t refuse. They’ve been investing in gold for several years and tucking it away for their retirement. Mom said they’re going to stop buying more gold and silver and live off of the proceeds from the sale of the company. Apparently it’s a seven figure sale.”

“That’s covers a large range starting at one million and stopping a penny shy of ten million.”

“I’m sure it closer to one than ten. Actually, the last time I heard them discuss the value of the business, they placed in the two to three range.”

“At the moment, the prime rate is around seven percent. It’s been falling though. If they intend to invest the money in something sound, they’d better do it soon. Say they buy T-Notes or T-Bonds, quickly; they’ll have a stable income for either ten or thirty years. They could also buy TIPS which are available in 5, 10 and 30 year maturities. Those are Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities. The interest rate is fixed, but is computed on the inflation adjusted principal.”

“But we’re in a recession.”

“I agree. That doesn’t mean we don’t have inflation. The Consumer Price Index has gone up every year since 1955. How many recessions have we gone through?”

“You tell me.”

“Too many. There was something like 33 before the Great Depression. Counting the Great Depression as the starting point and including it, there have been 13 more, not counting the current state of affairs.”

“So, 46?”

“You’d better make that 47. We’re in one for now, without much doubt.”

“Will we be okay?”

“Let’s analyze it and you can tell me. How much food do we have stored?”

“Fifteen to twenty years’ worth.”

“What kind of seeds do we use in the garden and fields?”

“Heirloom.”

“Fertilizer?”

“Manure.”

“Stored fuel?”

“Propane for forever and diesel for years. Gasoline maybe seven to eight years’ worth.”

“We have air, shelter, water, food. What about personal protection?”

“World Wars three through six.”

“Funds?”

“Two hundred ounces of Gold Eagles, \$1,000 face of junk silver and 200 Silver Eagles and our bank balance.”

“What about clothes?”

“They’ll have to wear what we put in the storeroom, if it gets to that. We didn’t miss much, did we?”

“We missed a few things but we can live without them.”

“For instance?”

“Night vision riflescopes. I’ve had a hankering for a Raptor 4X for my Super Match and a 6X for my Tac-50 for a while.”

“Why didn’t you just buy them?”

“Depending on where a person shops, the 6X runs anywhere from seven thousand up to ten thousand. The 4X is only about \$550 cheaper. Worse, they’re military and LEO only. Sort of like the HK-416s only different. The HK-416s are available from Class III dealers. To buy the Raptors, you have to submit a purchase order on letterhead from a military source or LE Agency. The only other choice is to buy them at the highly inflated price.”

“The Sheriff signed off on the HK-416s. Why wouldn’t he sign off on the Raptors?”

“What do you mean; they aren’t NFA requiring prior approval from local law enforcement.”

“No, they’re not. However the Sheriff’s Department could order them for you. What’s the reason they’re restricted? I’ll bet it’s to keep them out of the hands of foreigners.”

“You’re right, they can’t be exported. But I’m sure they’d be considered sniper equipment. Can you see him ordering sniper equipment for us?”

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“Daddy, Mona. I need your help. Alan wants two night vision scopes. Raptor. Both, the 4X for the Super Match and the 6X for his Tac-50. Yes, we have the money. You will? Thanks Daddy. You want a check now or when they arrive? Great, I’ll be sure the money is set aside.”

“Hello? Oh, it’s you Daddy. What did the Sheriff say? He will? And what did you have to do to get him to agree? You didn’t! Yes, I can see you wanting them too. Did you really have to buy the Department one to get him to agree? Oh, only half? Did he want the 4X or 6X? Ok, that makes sense since they only have an M-24.”

“Guess what.”

“You’ve been shopping?”

“How do you know?”

“You have a smug look on your face. What did you buy?”

“The Raptors.”

“No way, their military and LEO only.”

“True. I called Daddy and he called the Sheriff. He told the Sheriff he wanted four. The Sheriff said he’d only go along if he got a piece of the action.”

“A bribe?”

“No, a 4X for the Department’s M-24. The Department will pay half and Daddy will pay the other half. It will be out in the open and reported as a contribution by a local citizen to make it possible for the Sheriff’s Department to get some much need equipment they wanted but couldn’t afford.”

“I was starting to feel good because they had everything written off that they gifted us. Now, we’ll owe for our half of the price of the Department’s new scope. And, it’s still a bribe of a sort.”

“Nope. Mom and Dad will cover the other half. He said he hadn’t thought about night vision and he wants one for his Barrett.”

“And the other for the M21?”

“Exactly.”

“The next time I feel like telling you about something I want, tell me to keep it to myself.”

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There was a new camouflage pattern out called MultiCam. The company had tried to get the Army interested when the Army was looking for a new uniform. They selected the ACU rather than the MultiCam. I’d been to the MultiCam website and reviewed the pictures they had posted. It was obvious from the pictures that the MultiCam was a true universal camouflage pattern.

It wasn’t inexpensive by any means but like so many things, you get what you pay for. When I went to John and June’s to pick up the Raptors, we got into a discussion about the MultiCam. I took him to their website and let him judge for himself.

“That’s as good as we’re going to find, Alan. It says here that the Army and Marines are switching to the pattern for use in Afghanistan. What do you think three uniforms per person?”

“That would be a good start. The kids are 15, 13 and 10. I’m not sure about what sizes they would take.”

“They list Proper as one of their dealers. Get all five of your sizes and I’ll call Popper’s 800 number and get some information. The scopes came to fourteen thousand even with shipping. Mona said you guys had the money set back.”

“Check ok?”

“As long as it doesn’t bounce.”

“I’ll have you know...”

“I was kidding, lighten up. I ought to just give you those scopes since they cost less than twenty grand.”

“You’re retired; you need to keep a tight rein on your spending.”

“Bull hockey! Take ‘em and be gone. Then try explaining to Mona why you got them for free. Have a good couch do you?”

“She wouldn’t do that.”

“Are you sure?”

“You’re pulling my leg...aren’t you?”

“Yep, you’re so easy.”

On the short drive home, I tried to figure out how to tell Mona that John and just given us the scopes. I didn’t need to worry, June call Mona and explained.

“If they keep this up, they aren’t going to have enough to live on, honey.”

“Can it Alan. You have no idea how much they have in total. Night shooting tonight to sight in the rifles?”

“Sure, it’s as good of a time as any.”

“I see those aren’t throw lever rings. Will that slow down the swaps when you have to make them?”

“I’ll have to read the manuals first before I can answer your question. Could you do me a favor? Write down all of our clothing and shoe sizes.”

“I can but why do you want to know?”

“I’m considering buying camouflage uniforms.”

“You trying to get us openly labeled as Survivalists? Bad plan.”

“More like just in case.”

“Sizes from the skin out?”

“No. Jacket, trousers, boots and hats. And don’t put down that your chest size is ‘just perfect’.”

“Is it?”

“Of course, but that’s not a measurement.”